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VILLAGE
CONVERSATIONS.

VOL. III.

The Author of these Conversations is evidently a woman of much reading, and no slender talents. We can confidently pronounce her no ordinary woman, and there is clearly nothing wanting in her writings to render her extremely popular, but a popular subject.

Scottish Episcopal, Sept. 1821.

The reader of this eloquent and elaborate work will soon find that these Conversations are not by villagers. In Ethics, the Author dissects all the passions and delineates all the virtues; in mental philosophy, expatiates on all the intellectual powers, examines causes, physical and metaphysical, and finally leads her young pupils to the sovereign good, or the best interest of man.—*Baptist Magazine.*

The Third Volume of Village Conversations is an attempt to familiarize moral and political philosophy, by conversational dialogues. The design is very respectably executed, and will materially assist Parents in drawing out the minds of their children, with a view to the establishment of sound principles.—*Monthly Magazine.*

The Lady from whose pen this work proceeds, does not offer it as containing examples of conversational eloquence; but, desirous of benefiting the rising generation, has endeavoured to establish sound moral principles in the mind, and to demonstrate the importance of virtuous conduct to well being. The whole is written with the best intention, and manifests a mind of no ordinary reflection.

Monthly Review

VILLAGE CONVERSATIONS;

OR,

The Vicar's Fire-Side.

DEDICATED TO MRS. HANNAH MORE.

BY

SARAH RENOU.

What in me is dark,
Illumine ; what is low, raise and support ;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to Man.

MILTON.

VOL. III.

THIRD EDITION.

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TO

Mr. WILLIAM RENOU,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,
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THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED, AS A TRIBUTE TO THE VIRTUES, TALENTS, AND PROFESSIONAL SKILL OF A BROTHER; TO WHOSE EDUCATION IT WILL EVER AFFORD THE AUTHOR THE HIGHEST GRATIFICATION TO CONSIDER SHE HAS CONTRIBUTED, AND WHOSE CAREER OF USEFULNESS SHE HOPES MAY LONG BE PRODUCTIVE OF HAPPINESS TO HIMSELF, AND OF GOOD TO HIS FELLOW-CREATURES.

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Preface.

THE Author of these Conversations is conscious that the subjects she has ventured to discuss may not only subject her to the imputation of temerity, but be considered beyond the sphere and capacity of woman. In commencing her enquiry into the nature of Good and Evil, she was not aware of the depth and extent of the subject, or should not have had sufficient confidence in her abilities to attempt its investigation. She can only with deference submit her work to the promoters of mental culture, and hope that the first production of a

female pen will be considered with liberality and indulgence, and received with that favour which the friends of human happiness bestow on every attempt, however humble, to accelerate the progress of intellect, and advance the glorious cause of Truth and Virtue.

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Errata.

Page 24, line 24. For 'those' actions, read *the*.

— 81, — 20. — 'this' read *the*.

— 87, — 5. — 'prepolency' r. *prepollency*.

— 106, — 24. — 'mark' r *mask*.

— 118, — 6. — 'of Divine energy' r. *of this Divine energy*.

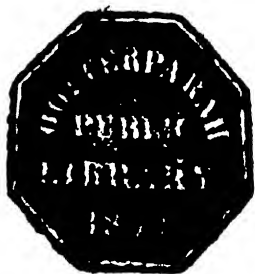
— 127, — 3. — 'criteria' r. *criterion*.

— 175, — 6. — 'no' r. *our*.

— 186, — 18. — 'the Deity' r. *of the Deity*.

— —, — 20. — 'worship' r. *worships*.

The numbering of the last six pages should be 205, &c.



VILLAGE - CONVERSATIONS,

OR,

The Vicar's Fire-Side.

CONVERSATION I.

Introductory Remarks. Observations on Physical, Moral, and Political Law; and on Voluntary, Instinctive, and Compulsory Actions.

AT the commencement of their next meeting, Charles thus addressed the Vicar and Sir Edward Berine. You both, my dear Sirs, some time since, objected to the proposition of an attempt to form a classification of the human mind, on account of the difficulty and abstruseness of metaphysical researches; and you have subsequently opened to us a field for enquiry of much greater magnitude. The civil, political, individual and general good of mankind, comprise topics of the highest importance, and which, in my opinion, require for their proper

discussion, a degree of intellectual vigour, erudition, observation, and experience, that can scarcely be expected from us of inferior years.

Your remarks, Charles ! replied Sir Edward, prove that you have attentively considered the subject, and are aware of the difficulty attending its impartial examination ; but when you reflect that your young competitors will soon leave their paternal roof, and have to act for themselves in a deceptive, turbulent, and corrupting world, without, perhaps, an eye of friendly solicitude to watch over, or an arm of prudence to guard them, surely you, who intend to consecrate yourself to the service of your Maker, will not hesitate to call forth every power of your mind, to assist in strengthening theirs, that they may be enabled to surmount the rocks and avoid the quicksands which they will have to encounter, but from which your station in life may be in a great measure exempted.

My dear Sir ! said George, what a picture have you drawn of the world through which we must pass ! Desirous as I have long been to enlarge my sphere of action, I tremble at the prospect ; especially as I am convinced from

the opportunities I have had of extending my observations upon life, that the description is not exaggerated.

You, my dear George! replied Sir Edward, have had from your earliest years the benefit of superior associations: your education has been conducted upon liberal principles; you have not been fettered by unnecessary restraints, nor compelled to give up your natural liberty and rights to any arbitrary will. You have been taught, that next to your duty towards God, obedience was due to your parents. • The practice of this has been easy and pleasant, because from your infancy you have been accustomed to yield your will and inclination to our judgment and experience; and in proportion as your rational faculties expanded, you perceived that our authority was only exercised to promote your future good. The nature of things will not permit you always to possess the same resources; therefore it is of the highest importance to your happiness and well-being, that on your entrance into more active life, you should be well armed with just and well-founded principles, that may enable you to avoid the many snares which may beset your path, conduct you safely and

honourably to the end of your probationary career, and give you that sweet tranquility and peace which attends a virtuous and happy old age, after a youth of application and a manhood of perseverance in integrity and propriety.

In proposing an enquiry into the elements of political science, I was merely desirous of ascertaining if you were acquainted with some of its leading principles, that you might thereby be enabled to form a correct judgment on the topics that may be discussed within the sphere of your observation, and not be carried away by the force of party prejudice, the rage of faction, or by any temptation to sacrifice your principles upon the altar of avarice or at the shrine of ambition.

Society, said Charles, arises from the nature and constitution of man. The construction of his corporeal frame, subject to so many wants and infirmities, and the social affections implanted in his mind, clearly demonstrate that he was designed to be a social rather than a solitary being. The origin of domestic society may be traced to our primeval parents. Civil society commenced at a subsequent period, when from the increase of families, and their intermix-

ture in communities, general laws became necessary to secure the good of the whole.

Society, then, may be said to have originated in the wants, and government in the vices of men. The knowledge of man is consequently the basis of the science of politics, as well as of most of the arts and sciences which are connected with the well-being of society, and the comfort and happiness of the human species. Politics is the science of government. The necessity for government arises from the imperfection of those who constitute society, in order that every individual of the community may be secured in the possession of his property and private rights, against the encroachment of turbulent and refractory members of the same community, or the invasions of neighbouring or other nations.

The first step in the formation of society, said William, is subordination. This is necessary in every stage and every degree of civilization, and without its gradations, society could not exist. Subordination is divided into natural and artificial: natural subordination proceeds from the inherent qualities, external advantages, or intellectual attainments of man. The external

advantages, as courage and strength, confer superiority in uncivilized life; and intellectual attainments impart superiority in proportion to the cultivation, refinement or degree of civilization which a nation may have attained; although even in states just emerging from barbarism, mental qualifications are in some respects properly appreciated, and in times of emergency or danger a council of aged and experienced persons is usually summoned, to direct the exertions of the young and inexperienced.

Artificial subordination arises from political institutions, and is requisite to maintain the domestic peace of well-established society. The design of every positive institution should be to promote the happiness of the community, by removing those external evils which proceed from the uncontrouled will of man; consequently the first compulsory law is **that** which prohibits the commission of wrong.

Previously to further progress in this enquiry, said Sir Edward, it is necessary that we should understand what **signification** is affixed to the term law.

‘ Law, in its most general and comprehensive

sense,' said Charles, ' signifies a rule of action, and is applied indiscriminately to all kinds of action, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational. It is that rule of action which is prescribed by some superior, and which the inferior is bound to obey.'

Physical laws are the regular operations of nature, ascertained from observations on repeated exemplifications of the same causes producing invariably the same effects. The efficient causes from whence physical laws are derived, proceed from ' mechanism, vegetation, animal life, and intelligence.' These vary in their operations, and produce different laws, according to their nature. Physical laws are inferred from a knowledge of facts, or are evidently demonstrable from strict observation. They are consequently the immediate objects of science, and the foundation of theory, which consists ' in referring particular effects to the causes from which they proceed.'

Physical laws may be applied to intelligent as well as to material nature; ' for there are facts relating to the operations of mind, which are fixed and invariable. Every final cause supposes mind, or an existing principle which acts to produce the end designed.' It is not neces-

sary to our enquiry, to consider the laws of the intellectual world as of the understanding and the will, nor those which relate to the material world : it is sufficient to observe that ‘ a physical law of nature is a general state of what is uniform or common in the order of things, and is addressed to the powers of perception and sagacity. A moral law of nature is equally general, though an expression not of fact but of what is good ; and is addressed to the powers of estimation and choice.’* Consequently, physical laws are of an imperious and unvarying nature, and moral laws of an obligatory, and arise from the intelligent nature and free choice of man in the pursuit of good, and are necessary to the happiness of the moral world.

Political laws are those which are established by nations and communities, and are absolutely requisite to the due regulation and government of the people who constitute them. They are instituted and enacted to enforce the practice of those moral obligations which are essential to the well-being of a state.

A political law is not, like a physical law, established from the observation of fact, but is enacted from choice, and is energetic and

Ferguson.

requisite on account of its rectitude and the high authority from which it is adduced.

Municipal law is ‘a rule of civil conduct prescribed by the supreme power in a state. It regards man as a citizen, and bound to other duties towards his neighbour, than those of mere nature and religion; duties which he has engaged in, by enjoying the benefits of the common union, that he contributes his part to the subsistence and peace of the society.’

‘The aim of society,’ said Sir Edward, ‘is to protect individuals in the enjoyment of those absolute rights which were vested in them by the immutable laws of nature, but which could not be preserved in peace without that mutual assistance and intercourse which is gained by the institution of friendly and social communities.’

‘The law of nations depends upon the rules of natural law, or upon mutual compacts, treaties, leagues and agreements between communities.’*

The sanctions of the law are the rewards it bestows and the punishments it inflicts. The sanctions of judicial law only respects penalties and deprivations of natural right. The sanctions of moral law are the sentiments of moral approbation or disapprobation which the morality or

* Adam Smith.

immorality of actions inspire, and the blame or censure they naturally excite, as arising from the merit and utility, or the demerit or moral turpitude, of voluntary action.

That man should seek happiness and avoid misery, said the Vicar, is the fundamental law of nature, the spring of action, the motive to desire, and the inducement to exertion.

The means by which he may most effectively promote his true and substantial happiness, is a subject of the highest importance, and deserves the serious attention of every intelligent and reflective mind.

Man possesses a material or animal, and an intellectual or intelligent nature. His motives to action must originate from the desire of supplying the necessities of his body, or of promoting the gratifications of his mind. The energy of his actions depend upon the ardency of his desires; his desires are inspired by his perceptions of good, and regulated by his apprehensions of evil. The more pleasing the good, the more ardently is it sought—the more fearful the evil, the more anxiously is it avoided. It is therefore essential to the well-being of man, that he should form correct and proper notions of the nature of good

and evil, and become acquainted with the means by which he may effectually attain happiness and avoid misery; since this primeval law of nature is of imperious and universal operation, and the spring of action to all mankind.

Actions, said William, I conceive, may be divided into voluntary, instinctive and compulsory. Voluntary actions proceed from deliberation and choice, or as it is termed, free volition; volition is influenced by motives; motives are excited by circumstances, our desires and aversions; desires originate from the idea of good, aversions from the apprehension of evil. Our sensations and opinions inspire our conceptions of good, and produce our notions of evil.

‘The actions of men,’ said Sir Edward, ‘are undoubtedly determined by motives, and these are governed by causes over which he has no controul; and as those causes are necessary, his actions may be acknowledged also necessary; but at the same time, these exterior causes operate on a man, only according to his estimate of them, which varies in different men, and in the same man at different times.’ From hence proceeds the morality of actions. Had man no choice, he

could not be a free or a moral agent. Did not motives influence volition and incite to action, he would be a loose ungoverned being, and not a necessary agent, as he now is, forming a part of the grand fabrick of the sensible world, or one of the stones of which the building of intelligent creation is constructed.

The actions of man, said the Vicar, however impelled by external circumstances and the imperious operation of motives influencing the will and inciting to a determination of particular conduct, or inducing to immediate and undeliberate action, most assuredly subject him to responsibility. 'Necessary causes may govern passive existences with absolute dominion; but in all animals they have to encounter the principle of individuality, the feeling of independence, the desire of well-being, and the energies of self-love. These, so to speak, enter into an argument with the causes: a process of reasoning takes place, a decision of judgment is formed, and that judgment it is that directs the will and the action. The action which results from this chain of reasoning may certainly be considered voluntary, notwithstanding the necessary cause which inspired the motive that led to a determination of the action.'

Instinctive actions, said William, if any may with propriety be so denominated, are those to which the mind is as it were imperiously incited, without any previous deliberation or inducement to a particular determination, but influenced by the circumstance or incident of the moment; as for instance, in seeing a child fall, the hand is intuitively extended, impelled by an involuntary motive, or a sensation of humanity which incites the action. This, being neither a voluntary or deliberate action proceeding from an act of judgment or chain of reasoning, nor a compulsory action, or one performed in consequence of an obligatory duty to obey the will of another, may be properly stiled an instinctive or natural action. This necessarily leads to an enquiry into what is denominated the moral sense; but for the sake of regularity, we will proceed to examine the nature of compulsory actions, or those which we are obligated to perform in compliance with the will of others.

Compulsory actions, said Charles, may be divided into those which proceed from the duty of religious or moral obligation, the duty of civil subordination, and of coercion or positive compulsion. Man being acknowledged ‘a religious

animal,' must have religious inducements to action, or intuitive feelings which impel him to seek after the attainment of some good, by the worship of some object capable of bestowing it. How far man, unaided by any light but that which he possesses in himself, or derives from the circumstances in which he is placed or the objects around him, is able to judge to whom his sense of religious obligation is to be directed, may be learnt from the history of mankind. But at present our attention is not called to religious subjects: we are merely considering man as a moral agent, incited to action by the principles on which the constitution of his mind is founded, to ascertain the basis of the laws of the moral world, that we may be enabled to form a better judgment of the principles of political institutions or the nature and advantages which result from the obligations of civil subordination.

Compulsory actions, said Sir Edward, as considered in reference to moral obligation, leads us to enquire what ideas are implied by the term.

Obligation, said William, properly signifies being bound to perform particular actions, or to avoid something prohibited. Obligation relates

to some principle or principles which are considered as laws to be obeyed; according to which actions are to be performed, certain dispositions to be cherished, and others to be avoided. It implies what is necessary to be done in order to obtain a certain end, 'a due sense of propriety.' 'Obedience or conformity to the commands of another, assumes the character of duty. Duty respects that species of obligation which is due to another, and implies a conformity to his injunctions or his interests;' in which sense we may consider those compulsory actions of moral obligation which proceeds from the duty of parental obedience and of attention to legal institutions.

The duty of civil subordination, said Sir Edward, is entailed upon every man on his entrance into society, and delegated to his offspring with their rights and privileges. It is of imperious obligation, as it is necessary to the support, protection and well-being of every civil institution.

Those compulsory actions which result from the necessity of obedience to legal establishments arise from restrictions essential to the happiness of society, and the protection of individuals in

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the secure possession of their property, rights and privileges.

The absolute rights of man originate in 'the natural liberty of mankind.'

The social and relative rights of man, 'result from and are posterior to the formation of states and societies,'

It is not necessary for us to treat of the diversified rights of men, either personal or real, original or adventitious; as this enquiry would lead us to the more profound mazes of political science; and we only proposed to glance at the elementary parts, to discern its connexion with the fundamental principles of moral obligation, or the intimate union of morality with politics.

CONVERSATION II.

*On the Fundamental Principles of Moral
Obligation.*

HAVING, said Sir Edward, made some remarks upon the nature of actions, we may now consider the principles from which they proceed.

The principles of the mind, said Charles, which incite to action, are different in different men, and even in the same man at different periods of his life. Every action, in a greater or less degree, proceeds from various modifications of the two grand influential principles, Benevolence, and Selfishness. Benevolence is the most exalted, refined and ennobling spring of action, approximating man by the elevation of mind and corresponding conduct inspires, toward the

perfection of his nature, and to an attribute of the Divine Mind. Selfishness is the lowest and most degrading spring of action, arising from an inordinate love of self, and the prevalence and general ascendancy of the animal propensities over the intelligent nature of man. The selfish feelings are the first that predominate. We must be capable of looking beyond ourselves, before we can feel for others. The selfish feelings become subservient to the higher principles of action, only in proportion to the progressive enlargement, refinement and exaltation of the mind.

Benevolence, said the Vicar, is unquestionably the highest and most ennobling principle of action ; but its permanent operation and complete attainment requires the subjugation of the lower springs of action and the culture of years. The mind inspired by this principle views the collected bulk of mankind in a focus, which presents the united whole to the mental sight ; and as the mind at an early period of life is not susceptible of these enlarged perceptions of benevolence ; so in a community, its modification, under the term philanthropy, is not discernible at an early period of civilization.

Benevolence, said Charles, arises from an ‘affection determinate in its nature, but indefinite in respect to its object.’ It is an ‘active principle, and inspires all the qualities which are requisite to attain its end, or all which fit one man to procure the good of another.’ Consequently it generates the virtues of Justice, Integrity, Charity, Philanthropy, Hospitality, Generosity, Fortitude, Courage, Magnanimity, Gratitude, Patience, Forbearance, Pity, Compassion, Gentleness, all the social feelings—generous propensities of the mind; and Wisdom, comprising its various modifications of Prudence and Discretion; and every ramification of the benevolent principle, as diffusing its beneficial effects throughout intelligent creation.

The benign influence of benevolence, said Mrs. Wentworth, extends even to the lowest gradations of existence in the material world.

‘The well taught philosophic mind
To all compassion gives –
Casts round the world an equal eye,
And feels for all that lives.’

‘Wherever,’ observed Charles, ‘the benevolent principle is duly operative,’ as remarked by Dr. Cogan, ‘it is at once a most delicate, and a

most efficacious motive to the practice of every social virtue. It not only avoids grosser injuries: it enters into the minutiae of discretion. It moves circumspectly, that it may tread upon no one, even by inadvertency. It feels pain at the utterance of a word that might prove displeasing to others; or at the suggestion of a thought that might operate to their prejudice. It considers strict justice as being scarcely entitled to merit; and the violation of justice, however secret and secure from censure, is most repugnant to its nature. It not only accommodates itself to the claims but to the wants of others. It shapes its conduct, not according to what they have a right to expect, but to what they may require. It earnestly examines what evils it can remove, what afflictions it can soothe, from what dangers it can protect, what pleasures it can communicate. It cheerfully denies itself many indulgences that others may rejoice in its bounty. It encounters many difficulties to extricate those who are involved in greater. Benevolence is the animated and active principle of love, directing its benign influence over every created being that is endowed with the power of sensation. The love inspired by this character destroys the servility of obedience. The mind under

the influence of this affection, cannot be satisfied with a superficial observance of commands. It makes the minutest branch of duty a pleasure; it is both minute and universal in its operations, and penetrates into the recesses of misery in order to relieve.' How beautiful is this description of the benevolent principle! How cold to feeling must be that mind which it does not animate to ardent aspirations after its attainment!

The influence of benevolence, said Sir Edward, under its various modifications, is in every respect calculated to constitute the interest, happiness and well-being of man. 'The good of the whole is preserved by that which constitutes the good of the part: and there is no good of the part consistent with what is hurtful to the whole.' Therefore self-interest, regarded in an enlarged and refined point of view, so far from being incompatible with benevolence, is best promoted and most effectively secured by its permanent ascendancy. But that conduct which results from an inordinate desire to increase our own separate interest, unconnected with the good of others, is totally in opposition to the prevalence of the benevolent propensities, and to the best feelings of a liberal and enlarged mind.

‘ Though benevolence and self-love are different,’ said William, ‘ yet they are so perfectly consistent, that the greatest satisfaction to ourselves depends upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and self-love is one chief security of our right behaviour toward society. Their mutually coinciding, so that we can scarcely promote the one without the other, is equally a proof that we were made for both.’*

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Refined self-interest, said Charles, considered in an enlarged point of view, produces effects similar to those proceeding from the prevalence of the benevolent propensities. The motive constitutes the essential difference in the action, since rational and refined self-interest induces us to promote the happiness of others, as the most effectual means of advancing our own. But ‘ actions purely benevolent, are those that communicate good to others, independently of the desire of self-gratification.’ Therefore enlargement, elevation and refinement of mind, are essentially connected with this sublime spring of action.

、 Benevolence, said the Vicar, is the divine principle of LOVE, animating nature, enlighten-

Lord Kaimes.

ing the understanding, irradiating the mind, inspiring virtue, exciting affection, imparting peace and diffusing happiness. It purifies the heart, elevates the soul, exalts our nature, and approximates the mind in which it permanently resides, to the beatitude of etherial being. It is the source of happiness, the origin of the social virtues, the foundation of morality, the basis of civil institutions, the criterion of virtue, an emanation of the Deity, and the Spirit of God.

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The principle of benevolence, said Sir Edward, eradicates every disposition inimical to its permanent ascendancy; consequently, pride, injustice, arrogance, and every species of little-mindedness, is exterminated by the refined and active operation of this divine energy.

‘A principle of human actions,’ said Charles, ‘is that which incites a man to act.’ Selfishness arises from the contracted views of a narrow diminutive mind, incapable of raising itself above the consideration of self. The propensities of children are in general more personal than selfish. As the affections expand, self-interest becomes more refined, but they must be capable of perfect disinterestedness before the benevolent propen-

sities can exist in their full extent, or be permanently operative in their effects; as this enlarged principle of action arises from clear and comprehensive ideas of good, and an anxious desire to increase its diffusion by promoting the happiness and well-being of others. ‘A benevolence permanently operative therefore requires mental discipline of the most exalted kind, and a superior degree of self-subjugation;’ consequently we cannot expect its complete influence, either at an early period in the life of an individual, or in the infancy of society amongst uncultured human beings; and although it is the fundamental principle of moral obligation, yet, in its most extended meaning ‘it is the highest polish which comes last; the Corinthian capital which finishes as it ornaments the column,’ and completes the grand edifice of the moral world.

The actions, said Sir Edward, excited by the various modifications or degrees of influence of the benevolent and malevolent propensities, inspire either moral approbation or disapprobation, according to the natural tendency of the actions to benefit or injure those persons to whom those actions relate. ‘External actions, considered as a feature of the human character, or as an emana-

tion of good or ill disposition, are a proper subject of moral approbation or censure, or come properly within the direction of moral government or law.* Every action which arises from moral obligation naturally inspires moral approbation ; although our ideas of merit and demerit proceed less from the actions than from the motives which inspire them.

‘ Merit,’ said Charles, ‘ is the presence of that quality which is the object of moral approbation, and demerit the absence of such quality, or the presence of any quality which is the object of disapprobation.’ Merit may be considered as absolute, comparative and conditional. Absolute merit, as it relates to principles existing in the mind, or ‘ a strong predilection for what is good and excellent in itself,’ may be attained ; but as applied to human conduct, the frailties and imperfections to which man is subject in this infancy of being, prevent the propriety of the application of this term to the present imperfect condition of humanity. ‘ Comparative merit relates to the favourable ideas we form of one person when compared with another ; and conditional merit respects the performance of certain actions in

* Ferguson.

conformity to the injunctions of some one who stipulates conditions.'

Demerit has similar gradations. 'Absolute demerit results from the total predominance of a narrow selfishness, and prompts to the most nefarious acts, regardless of the interests and rights of others.' Absolute merit can be claimed by no man; but comparative and conditional merit 'belong to him who ardently loves virtue and unremittingly exerts his endeavours to practise and promote it.'

'What might we not expect from the human heart,' said Mrs. Osbourne, 'under the influence of an opinion, that human felicity does not consist in the indulgences of animal appetite, but in those of a benevolent heart—not in fortune or interest, but in contempt of this very object, in the courage and freedom which arises from this contempt, joined to a resolute choice of conduct directed to the good of mankind, or to the good of that particular society to which the individual belongs?'

The philosophic moralist, said the Vicar, clearly perceives a natural and necessary connexion between the universal practice of virtue

and universal prosperity. He knows that ‘ the happiness of man in this life, when most distinguished, is not proportioned to his external possessions, but to the exertion and application of his faculties—not to his exemption from difficulty or danger, but to the magnanimity, courage and fortitude with which he acts’—that ‘ a beneficent course of life, uniformly pursued, duties performed in the midst of danger or unmerited obloquy, in the midst of allurements that would seduce, in the midst of pain and suffering that would depress the mind or daunt the resolution, as they carry evidence of a disposition proportionably vigorous and unshaken, are justly estimated as of the highest value.’

CONVERSATION III.

Observations on the Moral Sense, or Conscience.

PREVIOUSLY to any further progress in our subject, said Sir Edward, it is necessary to enquire into the nature and existence of the moral sense; since philosophers have been greatly divided in their opinions on this head.

By the moral sense, said Charles, is generally understood, a perception of right or wrong existing in the mind, which approves of actions morally right, and disapproves actions morally wrong.

In this as in many other respects, we have to deprecate the cavil of words, and regret the time that has been spent in useless confutations and unavailing arguments, which perplex the mind without enlightening it. When we consider things generally, particularly or individually, they

of course assume different aspects: for instance, my ideas of virtue, abstractedly considered, differ from those of persons educated with different perceptions of right and wrong, although my natural capacity for judging may be precisely the same. The ultimate end I may have in view, by my conduct in a state of competency and civilization, is to promote the present happiness, intellectual advancement, and final well-being of my family and connexions. In uncivilized society, the same principle would induce me to lay up the greatest store of provisions for their sustenance. My opinion of moral beauty or deformity must be the result of the bias of my mind or the association of my ideas. The same remarks may be applied to the fitness or unfitness of things. We must have a positive end in view, before we can apply the means necessary to attain it; and unless that end be precisely the same in all mankind, the perceptions of men must differ as to the propriety of the means pursued.

The existence of a moral sense, said Sir Edward, or of a principle residing in the mind, approving of actions morally right and disapproving actions morally wrong, is demonstrable from reason, observation, and religion. To injure an

unprotected, unoffending being, dependent on our care, cannot be an action natural to man, but must proceed from the abuse of his nature or his free-agency, and be repugnant to the perceptions of right residing in his mind, or to 'that light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'

The existence of this principle, said Mrs. Wentworth, cannot be doubted. It is the voice of nature, the foundation of moral obligation, the source of moral approbation, the operation of reason, the gift of heaven, and the distinction of man. It is conscience, that still small voice, whose suggestions will be heard, whose admonitions will not be disregarded; it is an emanation of the Deity, dwelling in mortals, deterring from vice and directing to heaven.

'Conscience! conscience! instinct divin; immortelle et celeste voix; guide assuré, d'un être ignorant et borné, mais intelligent et libre, juge infallible du bien, et du mal, qui rends l'homme semblable à Dieu; c'est toi qui fais l'excellence de sa nature, et la moralité de ses actions.'

The time, said Mrs. Osbourne, I hope, is

approaching, when Reason, arrayed in her pure unsullied robes, shall point with the finger of precision to the mansion of Truth and when man shall no longer doubt the existence of a principle which he must feel in himself, unless indeed its infallible admonitions have been disregarded, and its sacred impulses stifled by his vices and his crimes.

Conscience, thou silent monitor! exclaimed the Vicar, why sleepest thou? Where is thy influence, or whither art thou fled? Surely, scared by the vices of man, thou sometimes fliest from the earth to visit thy native heaven, or closest thine eyes to the crimes of him whom thou wouldst guide to the ~~realms~~ ^{regions} of bliss, but who refuseth thy aid ~~and~~ rejecteth thy direction. Celestial impulse, sacred monitor! where is thy power, when thou permittest man determinedly and deliberately to plunge into misery an innocent unsuspecting being, whom he falsely pretends to love? Vain pretence! hapless victim of fond credulity! He in whose protecting care thou confidest, he who vowed that thy happiness was dearer to him than his own—he is become thy insulter, thy betrayer, thy seducer. Execrable monster! could he boast of loving his country

while he augmented its evils, by adding to the number of the pests of society, rendered so through the atrocity, duplicity, and unpardonable barbarity of designing hypocrisy. Excuse my warmth, my friends ! but whilst man will gratify his criminal propensities, and involve in ruin the unsuspecting victim of his crime, England must still suffer, our streets must continue to be filled with beings devoted to wretchedness, and our youth become in their turn a prey to the meretricious arts of vicious poverty.

Lamentable indeed, said Sir Edward, is the evil of society of which you complain, which baffles even the legislative power to redress ; but while females of respectability sanction by their acquaintance those depraved libertines who think themselves excusable for having plunged a fellow-creature into misery, little advancement can be made towards a better state of morals. Surely women countenance vice as much by admitting into their society those who have thus infringed the sacred obligations of morality, as they would in associating with the miserable outcasts of society, who have been thus deluded and betrayed.

The wretchedness which this subject presents

to the imagination, said Lady Berine, is too dreadful to be dwelt upon, by a mind that can feel for the miseries of others. Unhappy is the father who has reared a son capable of thus degrading his nature, injuring his fellow-creature, and insulting his God; and doubly unhappy the mother who brought into existence a being who could cruelly sink another into the depths of irremediable misery.

This injury, said 'Sir Edward, as Paley remarks, in his Moral and Political Philosophy, is threefold—to the woman, to her family, and to the public.

'The injury to the woman is made up of the injury she suffers from shame, of the loss she sustains in her reputation, and of the depravation of her moral principle.'

'The misery must be extreme, if we may judge of it from those barbarous endeavours to conceal their disgrace to which females sometimes have recourse, and compare this barbarity with their passionate love of their offspring in other cases.'

'The loss which a woman sustains by the ruin of her reputation almost exceeds computation. Every person's happiness depends in part upon

the respect and reception they meet with in the world; and it is no inconsiderable mortification, even to the firmest tempers, to be rejected from the society of their equals, or received there with neglect or disdain.'

'Where a woman's maintenance depends upon her character, as is the case in lower life, amongst whom most frequently are the victims of seduction, little is left to the forsaken sufferer but to starve for want of employment, or to have recourse to prostitution for food and raiment.'

And as 'a woman collects her virtue into this point, the loss of her chastity is generally the destruction of her moral principle.'

'If,' continues Paley, 'we pursue the effects of seduction through the complicated misery it occasions, and if it be right to estimate crimes by the mischiefs they knowingly produce, it will appear something more than mere invective and declamation to assert, that not one half of the crimes for which men suffer death by the laws of this country are so flagitious as this.'

While, said Sophronia, the polluted victim is either languishing in obscurity and misery, execrating the weakness and fond credulity which

induced her to confide in the honour of her honourable betrayer, a prey to the excruciating anguish of heart-rending remorse, or what is worse, seeking to procrastinate her miserable existence by the wages of infamy, the author of her woes is perhaps solacing himself with the joys of Bacchus, or adding to his crimes by plunging new victims into the same abyss of destruction.

Ignorance, credulity, weakness, and vanity, said Mrs. Osbourne, are to be deprecated in the female character, as the chief cause of the evil of which we complain : firmness, strength, courage, and magnanimity, result from that mental elevation, which will not permit moral imbecility.

In the present state of society, said Sir Edward, youth of both sexes have to encounter many and great dangers. Happy are those who, well fortified by principles of religion, honour, and integrity, can bravely combat every temptation, and surmount every impediment to their progressive advancement in the scale of intellect and morality.

The best and only certain means, said the

Vicar, of combating temptation under any shape, is to fly from it. Human nature in every state is weak, frail, and imperfect; and in youth is peculiarly prone to err, and liable, from innumerable existing causes, to become a prey to the designs of the artful and the snares of the treacherous. *Let us never trust to our own strength, but fervently supplicate the assistance of Him, who can shield from danger, and support us in the hour of temptation.*

To return to our observations on the moral sense, said Sir Edward, we may remark, that although conscience exists universally, it does not operate equally. In some persons it is susceptible, watchful, and tenderly alive to the smallest wound; in others it is cold to feeling, and scarcely capable of receiving a percussion. Let us beware of silencing this celestial guide, or diminishing this heavenly radiance, by disregarding its sacred impulses and divine admonitions. It is the light of nature, the law and guide of the heathen world. Unhappy indeed will be those persons whose conduct will not even endure a trial by the standard of morality of the unenlightened children of ignorance and barbarism.

The moral sense or conscience, said Charles, is combined with the nature of man, and, like other qualities, admits degrees of improvement, proportionably to the attention bestowed on its cultivation; and I am inclined to think, like every virtue and superior endowment of the human mind, *its highest refinement is inseparably connected with genuine sensibility.*

‘The moral sense,’ says Lord Kaimes, ‘though rooted in the nature of man, admits of great refinement by culture and education. It improves gradually like our other powers and faculties, till it comes to be productive of the strongest as well as most delicate feelings. The moral sense not only accompanies our other senses in their gradual refinement, but receives additional strength upon every occasion from these other senses. Refinement in taste and manners, operating by communication upon the moral sense, occasions a stronger sense of immorality in every vicious action than what would arise before such refinement.’

‘The purest and noblest pleasure,’ says Aristotle, ‘is that which is derived from the practice of virtuous actions. The constitution or just economy of human nature consists in the

regular subordination of the passions and affections to the authority of conscience and the voice of reason.

The various modifications of virtue, said William, abstractedly considered, or the diversity of actions to which mankind at different periods have affixed ideas of right and wrong, is no proof that a moral sense does not exist, but only evinces the flexibility, variableness, and fallibility of the human judgment, which modifies actions according to its general perceptions of utility; or, to speak philosophically, according to the ideas entertained of the fitness or unfitness of things, or of the propriety of the means pursued to effect the end designed.

‘Peace of conscience,’ said the Vicar, ‘is a blessing intimately connected with holy and well-regulated affections, and both together constitute a solid ground of happiness in all conditions and in all circumstances.’ ‘S’il y a quelque joie au monde il est réservée à la conscience pure,’ said Madame Maintenon. Let us, my dear children, attend to the dictates and listen to the admonitions of Conscience: let us never stifle its impulses, nor disregard this sacred

monitor. Let us cultivate this divine spark, *nor insult the glorious Giver, by refusing to attend to its counsels or be guided by its dictates.*

The improvements in mental philosophy, said Charles, have demonstrated that the moral sense is formed by association, as well as the affections and general perceptions of the understanding. The culture of the understanding is therefore essential to the refinement of the moral sense, the formation of proper affections, and to the permanent operation of the benevolent principle.

‘To cultivate and enlighten the moral sense,’ said Mrs. Wentworth, ‘in ourselves and others, is a duty of the highest obligation,’ and of serious importance in education; since the moral conduct and happiness of the individual in every subsequent period of life must greatly depend on the ideas early imbibed of right and wrong, the refinement of the moral sense, or the tenderness and general susceptibility of the conscience.

. The analysis of the powers and affections of the

mind, said the Vicar, evidently prove that the moral sense is an acquired and not an instinctive faculty. It exists universally in a greater or less degree ; because it originates in and is dependant on the understanding. How beautiful is the conformity of scripture to reason and philosophy ! and how grand the structure of the intelligent world, which a knowledge of the powers and faculties of the human mind enables us to contemplate.

‘ The perfection of the moral sense,’ said Charles, ‘ consists in the conformity of its dictates to truth,’ and its union with the benevolent principle.

The moral sense, said Sir Edward, being an acquired, and not an instinctive perception, is no proof that it is not universal, since it is connected with mind ; and wherever mind exists, a capacity for judging must reside. The erroneous opinions entertained of right and wrong, proceed from the effects of early association, the perversion or misapplication of the faculties, and the baneful tendency of improper habits and malevolent affections. In a well-constituted mind, the pleasures and pains of

the moral sense are powerful motives to the practice of virtue, and strong preventives against the commission of vice.



CONVERSATION IV.

Observations on Natural, Civil, and Political Liberty. Remarks on the Nature and Necessity of Government.

HOW great, said William, how inestimable the blessings, the enjoyments, the charms of liberty! Ask the gallèy-slave, confined to the oar, for what blest boon he sighs? and he will answer, 'tis for liberty. Ask the prisoner, confined in the gloomy cell for the commission of wrongs on his fellow-creatures, what is as goading to his body as the remembrance of his crimes is galling to his mind? and he will reply, the loss of liberty. Ask the debtor, immured in the abode of poverty, through perhaps the extravagance or debts of honour of a thoughtless and dissipated wife, what adds to the anguish

which his fashionable helpmate has inflicted upon his heart? and he will sigh, the loss of liberty. Source of virtue, of independence and happiness! may I possess thee, while I live on this earth, and impart to the utmost of my ability thy benign influence to others.

The blessings and enjoyments of liberty, said Sir Edward, cannot be too highly appreciated, and particularly by those who may probably be called to serve their country by assisting in its councils. Therefore I am pleased with your apostrophe, as it convinces me that you know its value; and should you ever be delegated to that seat in the senate which I have endeavoured to fill with integrity and honour, I trust my son will transmit his name to posterity, unsullied as he received it from his family.

My dear father! said William, the principles you have implanted shall be the rule of my conduct, and your example my highest ambition to imitate.

You cannot err, replied Sir Edward, if you remember that 'the man whose public spirit is

*prompted altogether by humanity and benevolence will respect the established powers and privileges even of individuals, and still more the great orders and societies into which the state is divided. Though he should consider some of them as in some measure abusive, he will content himself with moderating, what he often cannot annihilate without great violence. When he cannot conquer the rooted prejudices of the people by reason and persuasion, he will not attempt to subdue them by force; but will religiously observe what, by Cicero, is justly called the divine maxim of Plato, never to use violence to his country, no more than to his parents. He will accommodate as well as he can his public arrangements to the confirmed habits and prejudices of the people, and will remedy as well as he can, the inconveniences which may flow from the want of those regulations which the people are averse to submit to. When he cannot establish the right, he will not disdain to ameliorate the wrong; but like Solon, when he cannot establish the best system of laws, will endeavour to establish the best that the people are able to bear.**

Liberty, said William, is divided into natural or moral, and into civil and political liberty.

‘Moral or natural liberty is the right which Nature gives to all mankind, of disposing of their persons and property, after the manner they judge most consistent with their happiness, on condition of their acting within the limits of the law of nature, and that they do not any way abuse it, to the prejudice of other men.’*●

‘Civil liberty is no other than natural liberty, so far restricted by human laws as is necessary and expedient for the general advantage of the public.’†

‘Political liberty is the security with which, from the constitution, form, and nature of the established government, the subjects enjoy civil liberty.’

According to Aristotle, said George, ‘any man who, through choice, and not from necessity, is not a member of some civil society, must be supposed to be either much better or much worse than the common lot of human nature. Consequently if any being in a human shape either has no propensity for the politico-social life, or has such a sufficiency of all things within

‘Government,’ said Sir Edward, ‘is the first part of economy or *ethics*, consisting in the well-governing and regulating the affairs of a state, for the maintenance of the public safety, order, tranquility, and morals.’

Lord Bacon divides politics into three parts, ‘the preservation of the state, its happiness and flourishing, and its enlargement.’

‘Politics is the theory or art of government,’ and ‘policy or polity the peculiar form and constitution of the government of any state or nation, or of the laws, orders, and regulations relating thereto.’

Neither an enquiry into moral policy or political economy is essential to the slight survey we proposed to take of this subject; but every man should be acquainted, not only with the nature of the constitution under which he lives, but also with the laws of moral polity by which his country is governed.

The love of our country is as natural to our mind as the love of our family; and he does not merit the appellation of man who is not anxious to promote its interest and augment its felicity; as ‘the love of the public and respect to its laws are points wherein all mankind are bound to agree.’

Every man, said the Vicar, does not possess ability to discover the abuses which creep into the administration of governments, or to point out means for their redress; but every man is capable of promoting the best interest of his country, as well as of his family, by a great and glorious example of virtue and magnanimity; evidencing in his own conduct, his adherence to those fundamental principles of moral obligation on which individual and general good is founded.

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The interest of man, said William, is united and blended with the interest of his country, the same as his interest is combined with that of his family. ‘The interests of society,’ says Ferguson, ‘and of its members, are easily reconciled. If the individual owe every degree of consideration to the public, he receives in paying that very consideration the greatest happiness of which his nature is capable; and the greatest blessing the public can bestow on its members, is to keep them attached to itself. That is the most happy state which is most beloved by its subjects; and they are the most happy men whose hearts are engaged in a community in which they find every object of generosity and zeal, and a scope to the

exercise of every talent and of every virtuous disposition.'

'While men,' said Sir Edward, 'pursue in society different objects, or separate views, they procure a wide distribution of power, and arrive at a posture for civil engagements, more favourable to human nature than what human wisdom could ever calmly devise.'

'Whoever perceives what are the qualities of man in his excellence, may easily by that standard distinguish his defects and corruptions. If an intelligent, a courageous, an affectionate mind, constitute the perfection of his nature, remarkable failings in any of these particulars must proportionably sink or debase his character.' This may be equally applicable to political institutions, or the regulations of polity.

'Virtue,' said the Vicar, 'is a necessary constituent of national strength: capacity and a vigorous understanding are necessary to sustain the fortunes of a state. Both are improved by discipline, and by the exercises in which men are engaged.'

'If the strength of a nation consist in the men on whom it may rely, and who are wisely

combined for its preservation, it follows that manners are as important as either numbers or wealth ; and that corruption is to be accounted a principal cause of the national declension and ruin.'

' Nations consist of men : and a nation consisting of degenerate and cowardly men is weak ; a nation consisting of vigorous, public-spirited and resolute men, is strong.' Consequently, it is not the possessions, wealth and population of a country, that constitute its superiority and strength, so much as the knowledge, integrity and virtue of its inhabitants. Knowledge is always power, and that power cannot be better applied than to the advancement of our country's interest, and the promotion of national good.

This remark is unquestionably just, said Sir Edward. ' The resources of war, where other advantages are equal, may decide a contest ; but the resources of war, in hands that cannot employ them, are of no avail.' Hence, virtue is as necessary a concomitant to the support, protection and well-being of a nation, as its numbers or wealth ; and in short, when luxury, vice and effeminacy prevail, however great the population of a country, extensive its resources, or immense

its riches, it cannot long exist in independence, freedom and prosperity.

‘Man,’ said William, ‘can consistently with his elevation of character, accommodate himself to great varieties in the constitution and government. The same integrity and vigorous spirit which in democratical states renders him tenacious of his equality, may under an aristocracy or monarchy lead him to maintain the subordination established. He may entertain towards the different ranks of men with whom he is yoked in the state, maxims of candour : he may, in the choice of his actions, follow a principle of justice and of honour, which the considerations of safety, preferment or profit cannot efface.’

‘When mere riches or court favour are supposed to constitute rank, the mind is misled from the consideration of qualities on which it ought to rely. Magnanimity, courage, and the love of mankind, are sacrificed to avarice and vanity, or suppressed under a sense of dependence.’

To suppose, said Sir Edward, that any

government is perfect, or capable of perfection, implies an ignorance of the nature of man, and of the causes and necessity of government. It is however desirable ‘in all cases, to know what is most perfect in the kind, that we may be able to bring any real constitution or form of government as near it as possible, by such gentle alterations and innovations as may not give too great disturbance to society.’

Every man, said the Vicar, who truly loves his country, will be anxious to promote its real good; and endeavour, by gentle means, to ameliorate its evils, redress its grievances, and advance its interests. But his laudable desire to promote its well-being will never permit him to scatter the seeds of discontent, dissension, and sedition, or injure his country by inciting sentiments of dissatisfaction in the breasts of his fellow-citizens, any more than he would disseminate discontent and animosity amongst his family.

‘To form a constitution superior to that of our own country,’ said Sir Edward, ‘is perhaps impossible; and those who indulge themselves

in complaints and invectives, should at least possess the ability to suggest a better.

The ill-administration of any part of the executive power may with more propriety in general be imputed to those persons in whom the authority is invested, than to the nature or constitution of a government founded on principles just and equitable as our own.

Persons who are loud in their complaints against governments should remember, that however excellent any modification of legislative power may be in itself, while man is fallible, ambitious, and self-interested, abuses will enter into the executive department. In this case man does not suffer from government, but from its mal-administration. He ought not to depreciate the constitution, or seek to new model what, perhaps, he would not be able to amend; but endeavour to remove the efficient cause of the evils of which he complains, by instructing, enlightening, and amending his fellow-creatures. This is the only effectual means of improving governments, and of ameliorating the condition of mankind.

While man, said the Vicar, is capable of committing wrongs, the rights of his fellow-creatures

may be infringed ; and society must require the protection of legal institutions. Before government in any state of society can become unnecessary, man must be divested of his vices and follies, and be incapable of injuring his neighbour, or of encroaching on the property, privileges, or rights of others. Those persons who maintain that government is an evil, should certainly endeavour to extirpate the greater evil—the depravity of man, which renders government necessary, before they complain of that government which secures to them the undisturbed enjoyment of their privileges, property, and private rights.

Every man, said Sir Edward, who is able to compare, analyze, investigate, and judge, must be sensible of the superior excellence of the British constitution. Any abuses he may perceive, he will point out with discretion and kindness ; and as a virtuous and amiable member of a family, prefer the good of the united whole to his own particular and private interest.

A limited monarchy, said William, is generally acknowledged to be the most desirable form of government ; but such a constitution is the

result of reason and deliberate reflection ; therefore a restricted monarchy arises from a superior *degree of intelligence and experience than is attained in the earlier stages of society.* The first form of government amongst mankind is generally an absolute monarchy, as was the case in the original constitution of the ancient Grecian states. The vices and unjust exercise of despotic power, the mal-administration of government, or the weak character of the sovereign, occasioned the dissolution of the primeval monarchies, and the establishment of the republican form of government. These in their turn yielded to the ambitious designs of bold and enterprising individuals, who either by intrigue, intrepidity, or superior usefulness to the nation, subjugated the people and invested themselves with regal power. In every government it is an infallible axiom, that the more enlightened the people, the more liberal will be the constitution of the country, and the more equitable and just the laws by which it is governed. Therefore, in free states, impartial inquiry will always be permitted, the liberty of the press allowed, and man will not be restrained in the exercise of his religious duties according to his opinions and conscience. Although in every government, as the

good of the whole is the grand consideration, and the sacred deposit committed to the trust of the legislative power, care must be taken that no undue encroachment of the part militate against the united and general good of the whole.

The propriety of hereditary executive authority, said Sir Edward, has sometimes been questioned; but surely a father bequeaths to his children a better heritage, in leaving them peace, security, and an established hereditary succession, than in subjecting them to all the evils of an election, or the commotions of a contested succession.

‘Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, and every sort of public institution,’ says Burke, ‘aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine, are not more than necessary, in order to build up that wonderful structure MAN; whose prerogative it is to be, in a great degree, a creature of his own making; and who, when made as he ought to be made, is destined to hold no trivial place in the creation. But whenever man is put over man, as the better nature ought ever to preside, in that case more particularly he

should as nearly as possible be approximated to his perfection.'

'The higher the rank in society in which the individual is born, and the more extensive the sphere of usefulness for which he is destined, of the greater importance is his education to the community, and to the promotion of the well-being of his fellow-creatures. The education of those persons who are likely to fill the higher departments of executive authority, in every nation, demands the most serious and assiduous attention. The progress of knowledge is advancing. Intellect is diffusing around the benignity of its beams. Man is progressively becoming a more rational, a more intelligent, and a more enlightened being: he is approximating by degrees to the perfection of his nature: he perceives the intimate connexion of cause and effect in the moral as well as in the natural world. The children of poverty imbibe mental light by the diffusion of the rays of truth. Liberty extends her wings, shakes the chains of despotism, and imparts her blessings to distant regions. Ignorance must be diminished proportionably to the diffusion of the beams of Christianity. Therefore the necessity of superior mental culture in the higher walks of life becomes more indispensable.

Equality never can subsist amongst men; but real superiority consists more in personal qualities, than in hereditary possessions—in the virtues and superior endowments of the mind, than in the fortuitous advantages of wealth, rank, or exalted station.

More public scandal vice attends,
As he is great and noble who offends.

JUVENAL.

CONVERSATION V.

Observations on National Well-Being.

AS the desire of well-being, said Charles, is inherent in the human breast, the means by which it may be enjoyed and permanently attained, is an enquiry important to happiness, and highly interesting to every intelligent mind.

The well-being of a nation, said William, externally considered, consists in its freedom from the national evils of war, invasions, encroachments of foreign powers on its natural or acquired rights and privileges, the exportation of its manufactures and superfluous agricultural produce, in free and extended commerce, and all other advantages connected with the general interest of the community. Its internal well-being consists in the domestic peace and

tranquility which results from the wise and equitable administration of just and impartial laws, founded upon the basis of moral obligation, and combined with the good of posterity.

National virtue, said Sir Edward, is a more necessary constituent to national prosperity than extensive population, wealth, power, extent of territory, internal resources, or external dominion. Virtue is no less essential to the happiness, duration, and well-being of states and communities, than to that of families or individuals. Attention to temperance, propriety, and economy, is equally important to both, and productive of similar advantages in their effects, either as applicable to individuals or to nations.

Epicurus observes, said George, ‘ that a steady course of virtue produces the greatest quantity of happiness of which nature is capable. Without a prudent care of the body, and a steady government of the mind, to guard the one from disease and the other from the clouds of prejudice, happiness is unattainable. By temperance we enjoy pleasure, without suffering any consequent

inconvenience. Sobriety enables us to content ourselves with simple and frugal fare. Gentleness, as opposed to an irascible temper, greatly contributes to the tranquility and happiness of life, by preserving the mind from perturbation, and arming it against the assaults of calumny and malice. Fortitude enables us to bear those pains which prudence cannot shun, and banishes fear from the mind. And the practice of justice is absolutely necessary to the existence of society, and consequently to the happiness of every individual.'

Every modification of virtue, said Sir Edward, is as essential to national happiness as to private and individual good. A deviation from the laws of morality is alike injurious to both, and productive of evil in its effects proportionably to the extent of the departure from the constituent principles of moral virtue.

Amongst those external evils, said Mrs. Osbourne, which are inimical to the well-being of a nation, war is unquestionably the greatest. That cruel scourge of mankind and desolator of the human species, in every age how many sufferings has it occasioned! The evils of war

may be most justly estimated by its consequences, and these are frequently such as make humanity shudder. Severely as the body of the people in a country remote from the seat of war may feel the burden of taxes necessary for supporting and carrying on foreign contest, the evils they endure are comparatively trifling to those experienced in countries where contending armies scatter devastation, desolation, and misery. The mind revolts from the consideration of the horrors occasioned by the ravages of war—nations involved in ruin, individuals destitute of the resources of savage inhabitants of the desert, who, prowling for their prey, have still a den wherein to shelter themselves from the tempestuous hurricane, the inclemency of the seasons, or the raging of the storm.

Moral virtue, said Sir Edward, is the origin of the strength, power, and tranquility of a nation, and the only solid foundation of national good. No community can exist in security, peace, and prosperity, independently of moral virtue; nor can any state be properly governed without an enforcement of the regulations necessary to promote the practice of those obligatory duties

which result from the fundamental principles of morality.

Virtue, said Charles, particularly relates to the principles of the mind; morality, to the manners or conduct. Virtue arises from motives which elevate man above the lower and selfish principles of action. The soul, warmed with benevolence, glowing with enthusiastic ardour to promote the well-being of his fellow-creatures, feels his interest united and combined with that of the human race. The universality of his love, like the dew of heaven, would diffuse around general well-being; but restrained in his means of usefulness, he can only ardently desire the good of mankind, and promote it to the utmost of his power, by devoting himself to the benefit of his fellow-creatures. The exertions of a Howard have animated many a philanthropic breast to extend his sphere of usefulness, and assiduously to labour for the diminution of the evils attendant upon erring and afflicted humanity.

While the selfish feelings predominate, the desire of benefiting others must be so dead and cold in the heart as to be incapable of exciting the individual to exertions productive of general utility or advantage.

The amelioration of those evils, said Sir Edward, which originate in a deviation from the laws of moral obligation, as extending their devastating effects to nations and communities, can only be effected proportionably to the influence of the benevolent principle of action, which is the foundation of justice, honour, and integrity, in the conduct of nations as well as of individuals, and equally applicable in the diversified relations to which they refer.

In the various modifications of action, said the Vicar, the easiest, best and only infallible criterion by which we may form a correct judgment of the propriety or impropriety of any action or mode of conduct is, 'to do unto others as we would they should do unto us.' This is the rule of life by which the degrees of morality or immorality may be readily ascertained; and in proportion to the deviation from this universal axiom, every moral evil may be adduced, and its consequent effects discerned: therefore, on the diffusion of this principle throughout a nation, depends its degree of virtue and morality; and on its operation in the superior departments of executive administration, results the propriety,

equity and justice of national conduct towards foreign states.

The balance of power, said Sir Edward, if minutely examined, might perhaps be referred with as great precision to equality of virtue, as to local advantages, internal resources, or any other less mutable cause. To expatiate upon the extent of power, natural advantages, or means of good enjoyed by, or necessary to the existence or well-being of any particular state or form of government, is not essential to our plan ; as we merely proposed to enquire into the principles common to national and individual well-being.

However extended an enquiry into national well-being might be, it would invariably be found, that as moral virtue consists in an adherence to the fundamental principles of moral obligation, and is comprised in the performance of those actions which incite moral approbation, so the sources of national happiness spring from the same immutable cause ; and as the duty of a parent consists in leading and training his children to the performance of those duties of moral obligation which can only effectively promote their permanent happiness and final good, so the

supreme department of administrative authority, in any state or nation, should invariably endeavour to promote attention to those fundamental principles on which the duties of morality are founded; and in every action relative to the enforcement of the regulations of internal policy or modifications of conduct connected with external power or with foreign nations or communities, the same invariable adherence to justice, honour, and integrity should be undeviatingly maintained.

The obligations of morality are the axioms of government, and the only true and solid foundation of any political or ethical system.

‘A profound knowledge of human nature,’ said Charles, ‘is of the most obvious importance in the political world. It not only qualifies the well-informed and sagacious statesman to judge correctly of the true interests of the community at large, but it teaches him how to guide the various passions and contending interests of parties, and of individuals, to the general good; and by adapting measures to circumstances that arise, and by accommodating them to the views and feelings of the different classes of the community, to conciliate the affec-

tions of the people, and to secure a willing and almost unlimited subjection to civil authority, independent of the exercise of external force.'

'The principles of action proper for a nation,' said Sir Edward, 'are perfectly analogous to those by which the conduct of every reasonable agent ought to be directed. In all situations of moment and difficulty, we feel the force and energy of various, distinct and, perhaps, opposing principles. Our volitions, if rational, are determined by the conjunct force of the several motives which prudence and wisdom suggest. Both in public and private life, we must view and review the leading measures of our conduct, in connexion with all those circumstances by which they can be materially affected. The rules of action, both political and moral, are immutable, because they are founded on the basis of reason and utility. The great end of government is the happiness of the people. The people are entitled to all that liberty which is consistent with happiness, and to all that power which is consistent with liberty.'

'The moral happiness of a country depends much more on the state of the lower orders than is commonly imagined. Not only the

characters and morals of the lower orders, but the general character of the nation is affected by it. The wretchedness resulting from extreme poverty has a direct tendency to debase the human character. Energy of mind, active bodily industry, and those combined exertions of both, which so much improve intellect, promote health and constitute happiness, cannot be expected in beings who are without hope, and who are not acted upon by the stimulus of adequate reward. A familiarity with this kind of wretchedness has also an injurious effect on the minds of the higher orders. Some of the best principles of human nature are lost, and some of the finest feelings of man blunted by too frequent sights of misery. Benevolence, that principle which of all others most exalts our nature, is almost extinguished in countries where large classes exhibit a constant appearance of wretchedness. Arbitrary governments have the most immediate tendency to produce this evil; but all other governments, which admit of continued increase of expenditure, indirectly promote it; and even the best form of government, by errors in its administration, may participate in the evils of the worst.'

CONVERSATION VI.

Observations on Man, as belonging to the Material, the Moral, and the Intellectual World.

HAVING considered man, said Charles, as a member of a political body, we may now proceed to view him as an individual, belonging to the natural or material, the moral or political, and the intellectual or spiritual world. He is invested with appropriate senses, faculties, and capacities, peculiarly adapted to his duties and situation, in each of these departments, in reference to himself, to his fellow-creatures, and to God.

In-viewing man as belonging to the material world, we discover him to possess faculties, senses and perceptions, in common with animal creation. The more his inferior propensities prevail, the lower he must rank in the scale of

intelligent being: the greater their subjugation to the authority of reason and the restrictions of morality, the more elevated his dignity in the moral and intellectual world.

The material nature of man affords the inlets to knowledge and the general means of mental culture; as impressions made upon the mind through the medium of the senses become sensations, and by sensations the mind receives ideas, by whose union or combination complex ideas are formed, which are connected with other ideas, and by the power of association the mental feelings are produced, namely, the affections, passions, desires and emotions, whose proper regulation and government constitutes the business of the understanding.

From the analysis of the origin of our mental feelings, we may clearly discern the necessity for the culture of the understanding, in producing a proper regulation of the animal propensities, and the subordination of the passions, desires, and affections of the human mind.

The essential difference that exists between man and inferior animals, said Sir Edward, constitutes him a political, moral and responsible being. Man is the only animal that selects the

form of government under which he associates himself in society, or chooses the laws by which he will be governed. Animals of the gregarious kind invariably submit to the same regulations. No alteration is made in subsequent ages, either in the mode of their society or the construction of their habitations. All other creatures are alike incapable of improving themselves or their species. Man only is an improveable being: he alone possesses an understanding, not operated upon by instinct, but regulated by reason, or the power of discriminating between virtue and vice, good and evil, and of making his election and acting accordingly.

The culture of the understanding, said Charles, is a duty man owes to himself; and a knowledge of its powers and faculties is essential to its proper improvement.

The principal properties of the understanding are, 'consciousness, attention, observation, reflection, thinking and meditation, abstraction, judgment, reasoning and investigating.' By the operation of these powers the understanding perceives and discovers truth, analyzes principles, investigates causes, and deduces effects; which constitutes another characteristic distinction of

man, that of being able to grasp into the view of the present the remote consequences of actions, and the probable effects that may result from them, either in reference to ourselves, to our contemporaries, or to posterity.

This general comprehension of mind, said the Vicar, aiding the operation of intellect and the fundamental law of our nature, which impels us to seek good and avoid evil, is alone sufficient to convince us of the evil and to deter from the commission of vice, and excite to the practice of virtue; since, independently of religion or the light of revelation, reason demonstrates the necessity of acquiring virtuous habits, and of acting in conformity with the duties of moral obligation, to promote our happiness and well-being, even in this life.

‘The formation of proper habits,’ said Mrs. Wentworth, ‘is of the first consequence to youth; as whatever be the habit, the effect of custom is to increase its power;’ which often operates in opposition to the dictates of the understanding, and sometimes even to the most impressive feelings of remorse and apprehension. Many of the most ensnaring pleasures of Vice,

while they lose their vividness, leave behind them a tendency to repetition, which makes her votaries more her slave and victim.

Habit, said Sir Edward, increases gradually and imperceptibly, gaining strength and power proportionably to its exercise. The knowledge of the tendency of habit, and of every propensity and operation of the mind, is essential to the advancement of the individual in moral and mental culture, and to the proper government and regulation of himself or others ; since by cultivating habits in direct opposition to any improper bias of the mind, different ones may be formed, of a contrary tendency, and the seeds of vicious propensities be in a great measure eradicated.

An acquaintance, said the Vicar, with the nature and operations of the mental powers, enables us to discern the most efficacious means of combating any passion or propensity inimical to the perceptions of the understanding, or likely to be prejudicial to our future happiness, by calling into action inclinations in direct opposition to the feelings we wish to subdue or restrain. Nothing can be more adverse to the

general knowledge of right, and the permanent well-being of man, than for the inferior propensities of his nature to predominate over his superior ; yet, when the moral virtues and intellectual faculties are not cultivated in youth, the seeds of criminal propensities will spring up, which will subsequently require the greatest care to subdue and the strictest discipline to eradicate. Happy is the youth who, assiduously attentive to the improvement of his mind, endeavours to subjugate every propensity that would retard his advancement in intellect and virtue !

The conclusion we may draw, said Charles, is, that the more our intellectual faculties are cultivated, the more enlarged will be our minds, elevated our perceptions, and the higher must we rank in the scale of intelligent creation.

This inference is just, said Sir Edward, provided the moral virtues and social affections have been cultivated equally with our mental powers ; otherwise our advancement in knowledge, instead of elevating us in the scale of creation, reduces us lower in the rank of percipient beings, proportionably to the abuse of our mental

faculties, and the abasement and perversion of our intellectual capacities and attainments.

The social affections, said the Vicar, are productive of such exquisite and refined gratification, that next to the cultivation of devotional feeling, they merit our most profound attention.

‘The affections,’ said William; ‘are derived from sensible pleasures or pains, received in conjunction with any object, or from compound feelings already formed by association, or from both together. They depend upon the general activity of the associative power—upon the proper supply of materials from sensible or mental pleasures or pains, in conjunction with the object—upon the physical sensibility of the system, and upon the facility and vividness of the powers of recollection and conception.’ Hence the delicacy of organization, which probably produces genuine sensibility and admits a superior degree of mental cultivation, is usually combined with a more lively capacity for receiving those sensible impressions that occasion stronger, more durable, and tender affections.

Generosity is a concomitant of affection; since affection inspires this impulse even in the most

sordid and selfish mind; but when the selfish propensities predominate, the affections can never be strong, durable or vivid.

‘No affections can spring up,’ said Charles, ‘towards any one with whom we have no intercourse, unless that deficiency is supplied by proper materials through the medium of the intellect.’* The operations of the intellect give strength and permanency to the affections; but, instead of permitting them to subjugate reason, restrain their ascendancy when inimical to the perceptions of the understanding.

‘Passion,’ said William, according to Dr. Cogan, ‘is the first feeling of which the mind is conscious, from some impulsive cause by which it is wholly acted upon, without any efforts of its own either to solicit or to escape the impression. Emotions are the sensible effects, produced by the impetus of the passion upon the corporeal system. Affections signify the less violent, more deliberate and more permanent impressions, whether of a benevolent or malevolent character.’

* Systematic Education.

according to previous impressions on the memory. Their power of discrimination may, in many instances, be discerned, but only as applicable to their present, never to their future good. Man alone possesses the privilege of considering actions in reference to futurity—of investigating their nature, and inferring their probable consequences—of discerning the intimate and necessary union between cause and effect—of deciding on the merit or demerit of actions, according to their utility, the degree of approbation they excite, or the moral degradation or turpitude which occasioned them. Hence it appears from the light of reason and nature, that man alone is a moral, responsible agent; since he alone possesses capacities which enable him to regulate his actions, according to their tendency, to promote his future good.

The moral responsibility of man, said the Vicar, renders every action a point of serious moment, because it is one in a chain which will convey its effect to futurity. This consideration demonstrates the vast importance of moral conduct; as a deviation from virtue, rectitude, and propriety, not only affects the present, but has a necessary connexion with and influence upon the future.

Man, in his probationary state, said Charles, is surrounded with innumerable incitements to evil. The passions and propensities of his material nature require the constant regulation and direction of his intellectual. The strength of mind which produces virtue is not acquired instantaneously, but proceeds from gradual, progressive and assiduous culture. The constitution of our frame, and the laws of our nature, will not admit the sudden impartation of principles that demand the previous process of the understanding in the attainment of distinct and appropriate ideas of the nature and real and essential properties which constitute moral good and evil.

The desire to attain virtue, mental elevation and extensive knowledge, may, from a lively perception of their utility, and a strong conviction of their necessity to happiness, and even to respectability in this life, be in a moment inspired; but this attainment can only be by regular and progressive steps, according to the constitution and laws of our nature in every other respect. The desire occasions attention to the means; the means, steadily pursued, lead to the end. In every degree of progress in mental culture, the inseparable union between cause and

effect exists ; as independantly of the cause, the effect cannot, in any instance, be produced.

This evinces, said Sir Edward, the importance and imperious necessity of mental culture, in producing moral virtue and giving strength and solidity to motives which from the power of habit frequently operate upon the mind, unconnected with deliberation, and sometimes even without its consciousness.

The progress of a moral agent in virtue, said Charles, is in exact proportion 'to the improvement, establishment, and ascendancy of virtuous principles and habits. The more direct, constant, and uncontrollable the influence of these principles and affections upon the choice, the less inclination and the less power there is to resist the feelings of benevolence, piety, justice, and truth.'

Elevation of moral conduct therefore evidently proceeds from elevation of moral principles. It is consequently of the highest importance to youth, that they should early acquire exalted and ennobling principles of action, which may direct their minds, influence their conduct, elevate

them in the scale of being, and approximate them towards the perfection of their nature.

‘ A knowledge of the structure of the mind,’ said Mrs. Wentworth, ‘ as far as it can be attained, is of great use in social life, and necessarily lies at the foundation of every just theory of religion and morals : it leads to the most easy and impressive mode of communicating instruction, and to the acquisition of those habits which may be qualified to appear with the most distinguished lustre and advantage in that sphere, whether of public or of private life, in which the individual may be destined afterwards to move.’

‘ The philosophy of the human mind,’ said the Vicar, ‘ teaches man to know himself, and to improve, direct and exert his intellectual faculties in a manner the most beneficial to himself and others. It impresses a just sense of the dignity of our rational nature, and the great end of intellectual existence : it directs to the best method of cultivating the mental powers, of preventing or correcting prejudice or error, and of enlarging the stock of useful knowledge. By analyzing the principles of action, and tracing

the origin and progress of affection, habit and character, it leads to the proper discipline of the heart, and supplies the most efficacious means of correcting all undue bias of self-love, of resisting the motives to vice, of restraining the exorbitance of the passions, of cultivating virtuous principles, and of attaining that just and beautiful symmetry of the affections, that elevation of mind and disinterestedness of character, which, when combined with vigour of intellect and comprehension of views, constitute the true dignity and happiness of man.'

'An acquaintance with the principles of this important science, enables us more correctly to appreciate the inestimable value of Christianity, and the strength of the evidences upon which it is founded. It leads to the most interesting conclusions respecting the worth of Christian precepts, and the exalted nature of Christian motives: it shews us how Christianity reconciles human nature to itself, and that the truth of it rests upon the well-known laws of the human mind; and it tends, beyond all other branches of philosophical investigation, to correct, enlarge and exalt our conceptions of the attributes and character of the Supreme Being,

and to lay a foundation for the most rational and exalted piety.'

A knowledge of the constitution of our nature, said Charles, and the laws by which it is governed, enlarges our views of the wisdom and benevolence of the Deity. The first law of our nature, which is of universal and imperious operation, incites us to seek good and avoid evil. Erroneous conceptions of good and evil lead to the commission of error. Our understandings must therefore be enlightened, to enable us to form a judgment consistent with the obligations of morality, the good of mankind, our future happiness, and permanent well-being.

The moral responsibility of man, said William, is demonstrable from the laws and constitution of his nature, his intellectual percipience, and from the power of the will to modify actions according to previously established principles, its prevailing desires and predominating inclinations, the determinations of the judgment and the general perceptions of the understanding; and although, as Locke observes, 'there is no freedom of the natural and general propensity of

the will towards good, and its natural and general aversion to evil,' yet the particular determination of the will to one action rather than another, is what constitutes morality or immorality; and whatever name may be given to such a determination, it is that which renders man a moral and responsible agent.

Motives, said Sir Edward, unquestionably operate upon and determine the will, in its decision; but the free agency or moral responsibility of man does not proceed from the power of the will to resist motives; as no such power is possessed by the human mind, but from its capacity to modify motives according to its pleasure, the previous character of the individual, or the tendency of the mind to incite to actions in unison with its established principles.

The benevolent principle, said Charles, existing in the mind, will not allow the strongest inducement arising from self-interest, revenge, anger, malice, or any other malevolent cause, to operate as a motive; consequently a man in whose breast the benevolent principle permanently resides, must be incapable of designedly

injuring a fellow-creature, or of doing a malevolent action ; but he still acts in conformity to motives, and his volitions result from the operation of the strongest inducement on his mind.

In the prepolency of motives, said the Vicar, inciting to action and influencing the will, the strongest must invariably prevail : hence the power of moral principles in determining the volitions of a moral agent. Instead of

‘ Reasoning high

Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate,
Fix’d fate, free-will, fore-knowledge, absolute,
And find no end in wandering mazes lost,
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy ;’

Let us endeavour to acquire those exalted principles of action which alone can ennoble our nature, deter from the commission of vice, and incite to the attainment of

‘ A generous virtue of a vigorous kind,
Pure as the last recesses of the mind.’

Man, said William, as belonging to the moral world, is unquestionably a responsible agent ; since he has intellectual faculties which enable him to comprehend the moral duties connected

with his station in life and situation upon earth as a probationer. He is not an animal impelled by instinct: he possesses reasoning powers, rational faculties, an intelligent mind—the voice of conscience, the law of nature, and the **WORD OF GOD**; and if, with these assistances, he cannot resist the incitements to the gratification of passions and malevolent propensities that are inimical to his well-being, the evil or suffering which his deviation from right must necessarily incur can only be imputed to himself, to his blindness, weakness or folly, to his hardness of heart, his depravity or moral degradation.

Youth, said Lady Berine, is the season for the cultivation of the benevolent affections, and for the attainment of every superior and ennobling principle of action.

‘ Yet art thou young, and yet thy pliant mind
Yields to the gale, and bends to every wind.
Seize, then, this sunny, but this fleeting hour,
To nurse and cultivate this tender flower.’

Happy is the man, said Sir Edward, who in the early period of his life has imbibed just and proper principles to direct his actions, and laid up stores of wisdom and knowledge to be his

resource and consolation in every subsequent period of his life ; for

‘ He, who has treasures of his own,
May leave a cottage or a throne,
May quit the world to dwell alone,
Within his spacious mind.’



CONVERSATION VIII.

On the Necessity of cultivating the Benevolent Principle of Action, and on the Importance of Female Education.

OUR preceding observations, said the Vicar, evidently demonstrate that the characteristic distinctions existing amongst men proceed from the prevalence and operation of the various modifications of the two grand influential principles, Benevolence and Selfishness. Benevolence is the in-dwelling essence of the Divine Mind, and the primary operative attribute of Creative Power. It is combined with, and results from the active principle of LOVE, animating nature, extending existence, and diffusing happiness. Benevolence emanates from its inexhaustible source, and approximates the soul in which it resides to its divine origin : it generates

every virtue in the human breast, and eradicates every propensity repugnant to its pure energetic influence—enlarges the mind, raises it above the exclusive consideration of self, and enables it to grasp into its view the whole of creation : it inspires devotion, and every intellectual pleasure that proceeds from the contemplation of infinite goodness and transcendent wisdom : it constitutes the happiness and perfection of man, and is the glory and essence of God.

It is much to be regretted, said Sir Edward, that the philosophy of the mind, and particularly that branch of it which teaches the nature and the various operations of the principles of action, is not more generally cultivated. An acquaintance with the structure, nature, and laws of the mind, and the principles of human actions, are essentially requisite, and should be indispensable qualifications in every person who is engaged in the instruction of others ; as the principle of benevolence generates every virtue that elevates and ennobles our nature ; and the principle of selfishness produces every vice which occasions moral degradation.

Selfishness, said Charles, is the lowest degree

of self-interest, or that principle which induces us to seek our own separate and personal gratification, exclusively of the rights, privileges or wants of others. It proceeds from or is combined with gross self-interest, incites to the most nefarious and iniquitous conduct, and may justly be considered as the lowest spring of action. Rational and refined self-interest combines the consideration of self with the happiness of others. These are therefore superior to the merely selfish principle; but the benevolent principle only can produce virtue, inspire devotion, and animate to the attainment of the highest degree of moral perfection.

The happiness and well-being of the human race universally, said the Vicar, is so intimately combined with the extensive diffusion, and dependant on the permanent operation, of the benevolent principle, that every means of extending its influence must be ultimately beneficial to society, and radically efficacious in diminishing those evils which arise from the predominance of the lower and selfish propensities.

The social virtues, continued Charles, emanate from this divine source. The affections

proceed from rational or refined self-interest; but the virtues, to be permanently operative, must be founded on the benevolent principle. The social feelings are so intimately combined with the nature of man, that they reside in a greater or less degree in every breast. Their power depends on the susceptibility of the mind and the intellectual capacities of the individual. Intellect should not be cultivated to diminish their influence or to exclude man from society, but to render him a more social, intelligent and agreeable companion. The mind most readily assimilates with the class to which it belongs. It opens with the easy suavity of equality to the charms of social enjoyment, and expands according to its degree of approximation to its own standard. The presence of a superior inspires that respect and veneration which prevents the mind from freely unfolding its powers. Familiar intercourse lessens but does not totally eradicate this feeling. The amiable benignity that invariably characterises the higher degrees of benevolence and intellect, softens the veneration they inspire, and excites the pleasing sensation of love and admiration, blended with respect and profound esteem. So admirably is the constitution of our nature suited to the diffusion of happiness

and well-being, that those superior intellectual attainments which enable the individual to survey, as from an eminence, the generality of the human race, instead of triumphing in their superior elevation, views with pity and commiseration the diminutive beings grovelling beneath, in the mist of error, prejudice and superstition.

The social affections proceed principally from modifications of refined self-interest. The social virtues result from the principle of benevolence, and are different degrees of its operation and influence. The social affections may therefore exist independantly of the social virtues; and the social virtues, uncombined with the affections, or at least with any pleasurable effects arising from them; as is the case when relative connexions are debased by moral degradation; and the conjugal, parental, filial, and fraternal affections, instead of imparting pleasure, are inexhaustible sources of anguish and misery.

A knowledge, said the Vicar, of the operation and effects of the principles of human actions, enables us to perceive the causes from whence moral evils proceed: by tracing their connexion and progress, we may discern them as invariably resulting from the prevalence and ascendancy of

the lower principles of action, or of the predominance of the material nature of man over the benevolent and higher principles of action and his intelligent or superior nature.

The conjugal, relative and social connexions, said Charles, are sources of the most exquisite and refined gratification, or of the most excruciating mental anguish and suffering, in proportion to the general ascendancy of the higher or lower principles of action, and the nature of the corresponding conduct they excite.

Were a knowledge of the springs of human actions, said Mrs. Wentworth, more generally diffused amongst mankind, the unhappiness which arises from improper connexions would not so frequently occur, nor the associations of early life so often embitter every subsequent period with regret and disappointment.

Affection naturally enlarges the mind, and transfers the thoughts from the consideration of self to the beloved object; but when the warm and lively impulse which inspires the strongest affection of the youthful mind has subsided, and the prevailing principles of action regain their ascendancy, of what vast importance it is to

happiness that those principles should be of a benevolent, and not of a selfish or malevolent nature ; since they progressively increase in strength, power, habit, and effect.

The necessity, resumed Charles, of implanting those principles of action which contain in themselves the seeds of virtue and happiness, must be obvious, from a very superficial acquaintance with their nature, tendency, operation and effect.

The progressive diffusion of the higher principles of action must greatly depend upon the care that is taken to implant in early life, those generous and ennobling sentiments which inspire them.

A knowledge of the principles of action, said Mrs. Wentworth, and of the nature and powers of the human mind, is of great importance in education, and should therefore be acquired by every woman who is desirous of qualifying herself for the proper performance of maternal duties.

The general deficiency of women, said Mrs. Osbourne, in even the elementary knowledge of

the higher branches of literature and science, does not proceed from their inability or want of capacity to comprehend the most abstruse subjects, equally with the other sex ; but from the little attention generally bestowed on the cultivation of those branches, or the means necessary for their attainment.

The pleasures of conversation in social life, said Sir Edward, must be enhanced by every increase of knowledge. •The feast of intellect communicates such exquisite and refined enjoyments, that those who can participate in so delicious a repast, find little satisfaction in pleasures for which so many of the human race sacrifice conscience, health, and reputation.

It is much to be regretted, said Lady Berine, that females so frequently spend that period of their youth which is generally free from solicitude and domestic duties, in trifling pursuits or frivolous amusements ; when by devoting portion of their time to the cultivation of their intellectual faculties, they might treasure for themselves stores of enjoyment throughout every subsequent period of their existence.

It frequently happens, said Mrs. Osbourne, that connexions formed at an early period of life, are productive of less permanent happiness to the female than those entered into at a later period; and this in a great measure arises from the little opportunity a woman enjoys in the midst of her domestic duties for the culture of her mind. The understanding of the man improves by his intercourse with the world: he progressively advances in knowledge and intelligence; and in a few years, probably, regrets having chosen a companion, so much his inferior in intellect and so little capable of rational intercourse, without reflecting that the disparity he laments is principally occasioned by circumstance and different associations; and that the time of the female has been chiefly engrossed by attention to maternal and domestic duties, and to the promotion of his family-comfort and convenience.

In many situations, even of domestic life, said Mrs. Wentworth, a female may find leisure for the improvement of her mind, if she possesses the inclination.

‘For you, bright daughters of a land renown’d,
By genius blest, by glorious freedom crown’d,

Safe in a polish'd privacy, content
 'To grace, not shun, the lot that Nature lent !
 Be your's the joys of home—affection's charms,
 And infants clinging with caressing arms.
 Yours, too, the boon, of Taste's whole garden free
 'To pluck at will her bright Hesperian tree.
 Thus self-endow'd, thus arm'd for every state,
 Improve, excel, surmount, subdue your fate.
 So shall, at length, enlighten'd man efface
 That slavish stigma, seared on half the race,
 His rude forefather's shame, and pleased confess,
 'Tis your's to elevate, 'tis your's to bless ;
 Your interest one with his, your hope the same,
 Fair peace in life, in death undying fame,
 And bliss in worlds beyond the species' general aim.
 Rise! shall he cry—O woman, rise, be free !
 My life's associate, now partake with me !
 Rouse thy keen energies, expand thy soul,
 And see and feel and comprehend the whole !
 My deepest thoughts intelligent divide,
 When right confirm me, and when erring guide ;
 Soothe all my cares, in all my virtues blend,
 And be my sister, be at length my friend !'

It is only prejudiced, illiberal, and narrow-minded men, said Sophronia, who object to the cultivation of reason in females, and who, jealous of their power and prerogative, would subjugate by the fetters of slavish ignorance the mind that is capable of soaring to the sublime heights of science, and of raising itself to the highest degree of mental elevation.

Man, stamp this axiom on thy haughty mind :
Degrade the sex, and thou degradest thy kind.
..... Be generous then : unbind
Your barbarous shackles, loose the female mind,
Aid its new flights, instruct its wavering wing,
And guide its thirst to Wisdom's purest spring.
Sincere as generous, with fraternal heart,
Spurn the dark satirist's unmanly part ;
Scorn, too, the flatterers—in the medium wise,
Nor feed those follies that yourselves despise.

BARBAULD.

If the cultivation of intellect in woman, said Lady Berine, occasioned them to neglect the performance of their relative, social or maternal duties, some excuse might be made for their continuing in ignorance ; but when it invariably enables them to perceive more accurately the nature of those duties, and the imperious necessity for their proper performance, nothing but the greatest degree of prejudice, illiberality and pride, can induce man to wish to retain woman in that ignorance from which she must be emancipated, before posterity can be benefited by the extensive diffusion and permanent operation of the higher and efficacious principles of action.

And thou, O woman ! form'd with smiling mien,
To temper man and gild the social scene,

Bid home-born blessings, home-born comforts rise,
And light the sun-beam in a husband's eyes.
Thy dearest bliss, the sound of infant mirth,
His heart thy chief inheritance on earth.

BARBAULD.

When such are the sentiments of a cultivated female mind, pedantry, pride and ignorance only can object to the advancement of knowledge and the cultivation of intellect in women.

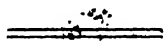
The education of women, said Sir Edward, in a political point of view, is a subject of serious moment to the community. 'A merely accomplished woman cannot infuse her tastes into the minds of her sons; and if she could, nothing could be more unfortunate than her success; but it is in the power of a sensible and well-educated mother to inspire such tastes and propensities as shall nearly decide the destiny of the future man. The most beautiful possession which a country can have, is a noble and a rich man, who loves virtue and knowledge; who, without being feeble or fanatical, is pious; and who, without being factious, is firm and independant; who, in his political life, is an equitable mediator between king and people; and in his civil life, a firm pro-

moter of all which can shed a lustre on his country, or promote the peace and order of the world. If these objects are of the importance we attribute to them, the education of women must be important, as the formation of character for the first seven or eight years of life seems to depend almost entirely upon them : nor is it only in the business of education that women would influence the destiny of men. If women knew more, men must learn more ; for ignorance would then be shameful ; and it would become the fashion to be instructed. The instruction of women improves the stock of national talents, and employs more minds for the instruction and amusement of the world : it increases the pleasures of society, by multiplying the topics upon which the two sexes take a common interest ; and makes marriage an intercourse of understanding as well as of affection, by giving dignity and importance to the female character. The education of women favours public morals : it provides for every season of life, as well as for the brightest and best ; and leaves a woman, when she is stricken by the hand of Time, not as she now is, destitute of every thing, and neglected by all, but with the full power and splendid attractions of knowledge—diffusing the elegant

pleasures of polite literature, and receiving the just homage of learned and accomplished men.' To this beautiful description I may add,—it gives her, to the latest period of life—the friendship, esteem and affection of her husband—the respect, admiration and tender regard of her sons—the obedience, love, and unbounded confidence of her daughters—the approbation of the virtuous, and the veneration of posterity; and above all, the sweet satisfaction of an approving conscience—the serene delight arising from reflections on the steady performance of past duty—the pleasure of contemplating a happy futurity, and a permanent re-union to souls in heaven, whom she trained on earth, to virtue, piety and usefulness.

CONVERSATION IX.

On the Evils which result from the Selfish and Malevolent Principles of Action.



AMONGST the evils, said the Vicar, which are connected with the probationary situation of man, those which result from the prevalence of the selfish and malevolent principles of action are unquestionably the greatest. The selfish propensities generate the malevolent, and the mind in which they predominate, is capable of descending progressively from one degree of moral debasement to another, until at length the most nefarious acts and iniquitous conduct are scarcely considered as a moral degradation.

An obvious distinction, said Charles, exists between momentary impulses of the mind and permanent principles of action: an impulse is

transitory, a principle durable; an impulse arises from a passion, a principle from an affection of the mind: a passion proceeds from an external impulsive cause, an affection from approbation and choice. By repetition, impulses increase in power and effect, and by habit, affections become permanently operating and influential principles. The importance of restraining any percussion or impulse of the mind contrary to the principles we desire to cultivate, must be evident from considering the tendency of repetition to lessen the vividness of sensible impressions, and to strengthen the power and force of habit.

When the benevolent principle, said the Vicar, is permanently operative, a malevolent action cannot be committed. However great the injury a benevolent man may receive, he is superior to the degradation and incapable of the littleness of revenge; hence magnanimity is inseparably connected with the prevalence of the benevolent principle.

The lower principles of action, said Sir Edward, occasion the external evils which attend societies and individuals. The predominance of the selfish principle in the higher departments of legisla-

tive power produces the evils arising from want of economy in national expenditure, and from the improper appropriation of the public resources. As the prodigality and thoughtless extravagance of a father involves his family or posterity in the evils of poverty, so the want of economy or the injudicious appropriation of national resources, must eventually be injurious to posterity.

Every external evil of society, said Mrs. Osbourne, results from the prevalence of the lower principles of action. Gross self-interest and the practice of every nefarious means to promote it, is discernible in every rank and station of life. Youth and inexperience are frequently hapless victims to hypocrisy, deceit, and other modifications of the selfish principle.

Young people, said Sophronia, are much to be pitied, who have to sail down the stream of time without a parental hand to steer or a prudent friend to direct them. The warm and unsuspecting mind of youth believes that every extended hand is designed to afford them succour or protection ; they perceive not ostentation beneath the form of friendship, nor self-interest under the mark of affection and kindness. It is not until experience

has withdrawn the veil, that they are enabled to discern, that actions to which their generous feelings induced them to affix the highest merit, were only diversified modifications of the selfish principle.

Every stage of life, said Mrs. Wentworth, has its peculiar evils to endure and dangers to combat; those of youth are certainly the greatest, because they are seldom perceived until they are passed, or if discerned, avoided until pain and anguish has resulted from them.

Every age, said Mrs. Osbourne, has its follies and fashionable vices. Society has its degrees and its prevailing corresponding propensities. In the present state of society, more has been done in principle than in practice. The seeds of knowledge and religion are sowing, which must be infallibly productive of good in their consequences to the latest posterity.

One peculiarity, said William, which distinguishes the manners of the present day, and which I suppose arises from that superior degree of civilization which admits the perfect equality of the sexes, is, that ladies throw aside the mo-

desty, delicacy and decorum, which distinguished females in former ages, and sally into the world unarmed with the natural reserve and timidity with which nature invested them, enter the field of gallantry, and at least equal our sex in the boldness of their advances.

The acumen of these observations, said Sophronia, may be equally applicable to your sex, many of whom consider that the delicacy of the female mind is to be sacrificed at their shrine, or offered as incense on the altar of Cupid.

The man who requires such a sacrifice, said Mrs. Wentworth, can have no real affection for a woman, regard for her feelings, or *if* his intentions respecting her are serious, consideration for his future honour. When a female is once divested of the native delicacy of her mind, the fine edge of modesty is blunted; the veil is withdrawn which would have rendered her invulnerable to vice, and she is capable of descending progressively to the lowest degree of moral debasement. Never, my dear daughters, suffer yourselves to be contaminated by the influence of example; never in the smallest instance descend from the dignity of your sex, degrade your

principles, or sully the purity of your minds by violating the sacred feelings which nature designed for your strongest safeguard and security—

‘ Innocence and virgin modesty,
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her as a guard, angelic placed.’

The delicacy of real affection, said Mrs. Osbourne, is incompatible with any modification of conduct, connected ~~even~~ with an appearance of self-interestedness. The greater the disparity of rank or fortune, the more the refinement and sensibility of a female mind conscious of inferiority, requires the strongest grounds for confidence in an affection sufficiently exalted to disregard the generally insuperable barriers of wealth and station. But women should remember, that

‘ Cold prudence must triumph o’er passion refin’d,
Till Hymen the chaplet prepare.’

A well-grounded attachment, said Sir Edward, is in both sexes a strong security for virtue. The mind inspired with an exalted affection is animated to vigorous and praiseworthy actions. It is stimulated to the attainment of those acquisitions, virtues, and qualifications, that will

render it more deserving the esteem and regard of the object of a refined and disinterested attachment.

Females, said Lady Berine, should be well convinced, that the man to whom affection induces them to entrust their happiness, will consider it a sacred deposit, and that the hand from which they are to derive succour and protection will never be raised to afflict; otherwise the refinement and tenderness of the female mind will only augment her sufferings and heighten every source of mental anguish.

A proper affection, said Mrs. Wentworth, even under inauspicious circumstances, may be cherished as a safeguard to virtue, a stimulus to superior exertion, a preventative of mean and vicious actions, and a source of the felicitous contemplation of a permanent reunion in the mansions of eternity, and not as a subject of despondency or melancholy regret; for

While memory watches o'er the sad review
Of joys that faded like the morning dew;
Peace may depart and life and nature seem,
A barren path, a wilderness, a dream.

CAMPBELL.

'The man, said the Vicar, who can trace the hand of Providence in what are termed the fortuitous incidents of life, may frequently perceive the combination of trivial events, the invidious designs of malignity, the strong effects of prejudice, apprehension, misconception, and many other causes operating to work His will. The brightest prospects of life and the fairest scenes of felicity may be clouded; individual suffering may be occasioned or augmented, but the Christian is convinced that his heavenly Father is

‘ Good when he gives, supremely good,
Nor less when he denies;
E'en crosses, from his sov'reign hand,
Are blessings in disguise.’

Youth is the season for activity and exertion : the trials and afflictions it may experience should not be yielded to in melancholy despondency, but be combated with strength and resolution—

‘ Shame to the coward thought that e'er convey'd
The noon of manhood to the myrtle shade.’

The individual sufferings, said Charles, which proceed from the prevalence of the malevolent

and selfish principles, are the greatest that afflict humanity.

The lives of most individuals, said Mrs. Osbourne, would furnish us with innumerable instances of the external evils they have occasioned. The power of malevolence to strew the fairest path with thorns, has been frequently experienced by the innocent and unsuspecting, who become the easiest victims to duplicity, malice, and other modifications of selfishness.

By contemplating, said the Vicar, the structure of the mind and the principles of action, we are enabled to discern the connexion of effects with their efficient causes. Thus the denunciation against the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation, may be traced as a consequence arising from the prevalence of the selfish and malevolent springs of action. Children naturally imbibe the sentiments and follow the example of their parents. Selfishness produces so many mean and despicable actions, that children accustomed from their infancy to attach ideas of rectitude to the conduct of those from whom they derive protection and support, cannot in future life readily discern

the criminality of indulging the malevolent propensities. Accustomed to duplicity and falsehood, the basest passions are readily gratified at the expense of honour, justice and integrity. The example of their parents justifies their conduct, and they are scarcely conscious of impropriety in allowing malevolence to reduce them to the lowest degree of moral degradation.

If parents, said Sophronia, would reflect on the ill consequences that must eventually proceed from every modification of malevolence, never would the efforts of inventive ingenuity be employed to injure the helpless, the innocent and unprotected.

Slander, said Mrs. Osbourne, may cloud with her envenomed breath the most unspotted fame : the fairest reputation may be sullied by malignity, and the brightest prospect of life be blasted by calumny ; but the individual whom the arts of hypocrisy may have deprived of friends, reputation, and the means of obtaining a subsistence, is from the wise constitution of our nature enabled to acquire additional strength of mind and elevation of character—rises in the scale of being, and is furnished with an opportunity of displaying

virtues and mental energies which might never otherwise have been called into action.

‘ Good name, in man or woman,
Is the immediate jewel of our souls :
He that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.’

Women, said Lady Berine, in every situation in life, cannot be too scrupulously attentive to their conduct, that they may never give occasion for the invidious insinuations of malignity, envy and hypocrisy.

‘ ’Tis said of widow, maid, and wife,
That honour is a woman’s life.
Unhappy sex ! who only claim
A being in the breath of fame,
Which tainted not the quick’ning gales
That sweep Sabæa’s spicy vales ;
Nor all the healing sweets restore
That breathe along Arabia’s shore.
For woman no redemption knows :
The wounds of honour never close.’

When we contemplate, said Charles, the vices and lamentable effects arising from malevolence, the philanthropic breast must glow with ardent desire for its extirpation, and consider no exertions too great to diminish the evils it occasions.

The principle of malevolence, in its existing operations, produces the most abject degradation of moral character; and as it is essential to virtue and happiness that every malevolent propensity be eradicated, and the benevolent principle permanently pervade the mind, how important is the cultivation of this principle, which alone approximates the soul to its divine origin, and constitutes its perfection and felicity ! The pains of malevolence infinitely counterbalance its pleasures. The gratification of the most inveterate malice imparts only a transient satisfaction, which must be succeeded by the most humiliating conviction of moral debasement. As the contemplation of the laws of our nature enables us to discern the intimate connexion between virtue and happiness, vice and misery, the highest interest of man must be the acquisition of those principles that invariably produce happiness, and the eradication of those vicious propensities which constitute evil, and contain in themselves the seeds of pain and misery.

CONVERSATION X.

*Utility the Design of Creation, and the End of
Intellectual Existence.*

HAVING, said Sir Edward, displayed some of the deformities of Malevolence, we may at present contemplate the pleasures resulting from the permanent operation of the Benevolent Principle.

Oh! deemest thou indeed
No kind endearment here by Nature given,
No sweetly melting softness, which attracts,
O'er all that edge of pain, the social powers,
To this their proper action and their end?

AKENSIDE.

The pleasures of benevolence, said Charles, can only be enjoyed by the three higher classes in our combining scale of intellect and morality; as every modification of its operation and influence is their peculiar distinction; selfishness

being the governing principle of the fourth class.

The characteristic distinctions, said George, existing amongst mankind, doubtless arise from different degrees of the influence and operation of the benevolent and selfish principles. Benevolence must animate to the attainment of every virtue—produce family love, fraternal harmony, and domestic felicity.

The operation of this divine principle, said Mrs. Wentworth, is conspicuous in the most trivial circumstances of domestic life: to promote the comfort, happiness, and well-being of others, is its study, occupation, and delight. In the subordinate stations of society, it produces those kind and conciliating attentions which cement affection, and constitute the exquisite and refined pleasures of social intercourse. But the sphere of humble usefulness is too contracted to display this principle in all its beauty and loveliness: it is only in the higher departments that it shines in resplendent lustre, when beneficence, philanthropy and generosity dispense with discriminating liberality those superfluous riches which, if treasured for selfish gratification,

render their possessors more proper objects of pity, than of envy and adulation.

Rank, fortune, or talents, said Charles, cannot ennoble the individual, or impart happiness to their possessor, unconnected with the active operation of Divine Energy.

Elevation of mind, and its necessary effect, exaltation of character, may exist in the most humble sphere. The real dignity of man does not proceed from external possessions, but from the acquisition and developement of those virtues that elevate him in the scale of being, and must eventually constitute his perfection and felicity.

The mind, said the Vicar, that is animated by benevolence, cannot repose in apathetic ease, when it possesses ability to alleviate pain, to soothe distress, or console affliction : it never designedly imparts a pang to the heart, or causes the bosom of a fellow-creature to heave an unnecessary sigh : it patiently endures, but will not purposely afflict : it consoles, but will not distress : if it has unintentionally occasioned pain or excited a tear, it flies to alleviate, and is

impatient to redress. The pleasures of benevolence are celestial, and its sufferings are those of virtue.

Virtue, said Mrs. Osbourne, is a vigorous plant, nurtured in the rugged soil of pain and suffering, and not of spontaneous growth, or the produce of tender culture. A greater portion of what are termed the ills of life frequently await the sensitive soul of benevolence and virtue.

‘Where glow exalted sense and taste refined;
There keener anguish rankles in the mind,
There feeling is diffused through every part,
Thrills in each nerve, and lives in all the heart;
And those whose generous souls each tear would keep
From others’ eyes, are born themselves to weep.’

The heart that is tenderly alive to affection, is susceptible of the most acute anguish from the unkindness or disregard of relative or social connexions. The more the affections expand, the less they concentrate in self; and the more painful are the mental sufferings that proceed from unhappy domestic associations, when combined with refinement in the social feelings.

Benevolence, said the Vicar, frequently experiences the painful stings of ingratitude, and

endures many personal inconveniences, from its readiness to alleviate the wants and administer to the comfort and enjoyments of others; but the recollection of every action connected with the influence of this benign principle, imparts the most pleasing serenity to the mind, and enables it to rely with greater confidence and security in the goodness of a beneficent and superintending Providence;

‘ For blessings ever wait on virtuous deeds,
And though a late, a sure reward succeeds.’

Proper regard to our own interest, said Sir Edward, is by no means incompatible with the operation of the benevolent principle. Prudence, justice, and discretion, are modifications of benevolence, and are equally applicable to ourselves and to our diversified connexions in life.

Benevolence, said Charles, being an active principle, it produces a life of active virtue and general usefulness. It is an old axiom, ‘ that no life can be pleasing to God, that is not useful to man ;’ and a very superficial acquaintance with any science connected with the study of natural

philosophy, enables us to perceive that utility is the design and end of creation.

Every part of nature, said the Vicar, is replete with existence: ‘the springing grass, the opening flower, the spreading tree, are each of them the habitation of innumerable living things; all of them enjoying the utmost perfection of their natures, and rejoicing in the liberality of an unknown God. When from these minute and invisible objects of his bounty we raise our eyes, and indulge our memory and imagination, and extend our view more widely through all the regions of the earth, the waters, and the air—of the stagnant lake, the flowing river, and the restless ocean—on every climate, under every sky—on the lonely forest, the barren hills, and uncultivated vales; when we find them all inhabited by their proper people, not a corner of the world, scarcely an atom of creation, but where some happy being is rejoicing in his goodness, our souls are elevated with diviner transports—we seem to sympathize with the whole creation of God, and in some measure to enjoy the happiness of the world.’

The most beautiful harmony, said Charles, is

also conspicuous throughout every part of nature. The most regular gradations are discernible, not only in the animal creation, but likewise in the vegetable and mineral kingdom ; for

‘ Each moss, each crawling insect, holds a rank
Important in the plan of HIM who framed
This chain of being.’

As utility, resumed the Vicar, is evidently the design of creation, the chief aim of the actions of a moral agent should be directed to the promotion of this great end. The bowers of sloth should be avoided ; and the syrens that would allure to repose in her life-consuming vales, be regarded as the ensnarers of youth and the corruptors of virtue.

No man was made for himself alone : he is one of the stones in the great fabric of the universe, filling the sphere allotted him, and should perform the duties assigned by the Great Regulator ; and as he cannot live *of* himself, he should not live *to* himself ; but endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to advance the happiness of his relative and social connéxions, and to promote the general well-being of his fellow-creatures. Every valuable enjoyment, every rational gratification, of which our social capacities render us

susceptible, proceed from our connexion with others. The common pleasures of life are heightened by participation, and every exquisite and refined gratification is derived from the delightful intercourse of friendship, tenderness, and affection.

How frequently, said Mrs. Osbourne, are the enjoyments of life diminished, and those moments embittered by pain and mortification, that might have been gladdened by the smile of affection and the delights of social enjoyment, for want of the proper cultivation of the benevolent principle. When benevolence and affection pervade the mind, how readily are errors overlooked! how cheefully are offences forgiven! and with what consideration and indulgence are the imperfections of humanity regarded.

Elevation of mind, said Mrs. Wentworth, is by no means incompatible with tenderness of affection: on the contrary, the social feelings prevail in their greatest extent and refinement in the most enlarged and cultivated minds; unless, indeed, disappointment has chilled their ardour, nipped them in the bud, or austerity

blighted, by the severity of her frown, the opening blossom of ardent affection.

The mind, said Sir Edward, in which the benevolent principle predominates, cannot behold the bulk of mankind grovelling in folly, ignorance, and error, without commiseration, and ardently desiring the diminution of the evils that proceed from the prevalence of the lower propensities.

Benevolence, said Charles, is happily attended with enlarged and comprehensive views, as well as with the exquisite feelings of sympathetic and refined sensibility, otherwise the contemplation of the evils of humanity would overwhelm with anguish the mind that was capable of participating in the sufferings that must result from the predominance of the principle which generates them.

The perfection of mind, said the Vicar, consists in the enlargement of its faculties or the extent of its powers and the comprehension of its views. If benevolence does not prevail, the mind cannot have attained the elevation of which it is capable, nor can its powers be fully developed. The ultimate perfection of man will consist in the

perfect spirituality of his affections, their approximation to the Divine Nature, or in the attainment of pure, permanent, and disinterested benevolence. The most elevated degree we can attain in this life, only enables us to practise very imperfectly the virtues it inspires and the duties it enjoins. In a future state of existence, 'when this mortal shall have put on immortality,' the beatitude of this celestial principle, this vital essence or pure emanation of the Deity, will fill the soul with ineffable delight, and constitute its permanent enjoyment and transcendent felicity. The happiness of a moral agent must consist in the conformity of his desires and affections to the will of his Creator. The Almighty loves virtue, and desires the happiness of his intelligent creatures. 'Why will ye die?' asks the inspired penman; why will ye suffer the lower propensities of your animal nature to subjugate your intellectual? Why will ye allow the selfish and malevolent principles of action to reduce you to the lowest degree of moral degradation? Why compel the moral Governor of the Universe to inflict on his sensible creation, those sufferings in a future state of being that must involve them in unspeakable misery? Why will ye not be conformable to the will of your Heavenly Father,

who called you into existence to increase the general sum of happiness, who punishes with regret, and only to promote the more extensive diffusion of good.

How frequently, said Sir Edward, do ignorance and superstition affix ideas to the Author of Nature, at which intellect recoils and humanity shudders! How careful should we be, lest for want of proper reflection we imbibe and propagate opinions that involve the Divine Attributes in doubt, and only exist in the views of unexpanded minds.

To attain happiness in this life, resumed the Vicar, the mind must be capable of raising itself to the contemplation of the Deity, feel delight in His worship, and devote itself to His service. The life of a virtuous man is a life of usefulness, his enjoyments are those of benevolence, and his highest felicity arises from his endeavours to perform the will of his Creator.

Moral good and evil, said Charles, are peculiar to mind: they result from and are connected with it, during every stage of intellectual being. Moral evil is 'the disagreement between the actions of

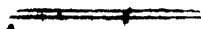
a moral agent and the rule of those actions.' The will of God is the best rule of life, the only infallible guide of a moral agent, the criteria of virtue, and the source of happiness. It is clearly deducible from reason, our observations upon nature, and the evident design of creation, that the will of God is best performed by the increase of happiness, which can only be effected by promoting virtue; consequently the cultivation of the benevolent principle, under the various modifications of the social, active, and personal virtues, must be consistent with the will of the Creator, and his design of intellectual existence.

Our preceding observations, said the Vicar, have evidently demonstrated that moral evil proceeds from the predominance of the animal propensities over the intellectual, or from the subserviency of the intelligent or superior nature of man to his material or inferior nature. His moral responsibility arises from his intellectual capacities, which enable him to discern and discriminate between good and evil. His wrong elections produce moral evil, and subject him to responsibility, in proportion to the convictions of the understanding, the ability of judging, or previous knowledge of right, acquired by the indi-

vidual. The distinction of merit is greatly diminished, by considering that our knowledge of right results from the perceptions of the understanding, that the accuracy of those perceptions depend upon the previous degree of mental culture, that the ability of discriminating properly arises from the capacity of the intellect and the direction of his judgment; unless the individual has enjoyed the means which have enabled him to improve his understanding, and to give a proper direction to the judgment, ignorance, imbecility, and error, might pervade his mind, and prevent proper discrimination. This consideration excludes the idea of individual merit; but demerit exists in its lowest degree, when opportunities are shamefully neglected, the means of mental culture disregarded, and man becomes a voluntary victim to ignorance, prejudice and folly.

This important truth cannot be too carefully inculcated and seriously attended to. Lamentable indeed will be the consequences attending the neglect of the means of improvement, to thousands of the human species. Time, though so 'fleeting a vapour,' is a gift for which we shall be responsible, and if misapplied, the consequences must be productive of pain and misery.

‘Departed hours and neglected talents, are like departed and neglected friends. When they come to stand upon the margin of the grave, when from their bed of death they look back upon their forepast life and on their former talents, then it is that men wish most earnestly to call back the years that are gone by; then it is that they lament their insensibility and negligence.’ But conviction and repentance are too late, the probationary time is passed, opportunity is no longer afforded, and they must appear before the tribunal of their Maker, to answer for the misapplication of their talents, the abuse of their faculties, the perversion of their mental powers, and of the end of their intellectual existence.



CONVERSATION XI.

On the Origin of Evil.

FROM considering, said William, the nature of moral evil, its connexion with the lower principles of action, and the inferior propensities of the human species, we are naturally led to enquire, wherefore a being formed with capacities for acquiring an infinite accession of happiness, should possess the power to abuse his faculties, pervert the end of his creation, and to reduce himself, by his moral debasement, to a rank far below that of unimproveable animals?

Had it been consistent with the will of the Author of Nature, said Charles, he could doubtless have placed at the head of animal creation a being far superior to man; but by doing so, the present order of things must have been

differently constituted; animals of superior orders must have been also created, or a chasm have been left in the chain of creation, of which,

‘ If a link were lost,
It would break the chain, and leave behind a gap
Which Nature’s self would rue.’

Every part of nature, said the Vicar, displays the most exact and regular gradations; the whole beautifully blending and harmonizing together, from the lowest order of created beings to the highest. Every variety of animal existence is combined with the preceding, and serves as a link to connect the succeeding order, and thus progressively advances by regular and successive steps, to man. Had an angel been placed at the head of this world, to fill the sphere for which man was designed, how lamentable would have been his situation! Compelled to labour for his daily sustenance, obliged to devote his thoughts and exertions to supply the necessities of his body, furnished with such vast capacities for enjoying celestial beatitude, and supplied with so few opportunities of gratifying the capacities and desires of his nature, we cannot admit such a supposition possible, without involving in doubt the beneficence and wisdom of the Creator.

From the present order of things, no such confusion and inconvenience arises : from the lowest gradation of animal nature to the highest, a regular connexion is maintained. The chain of existence is united by gradual and successive links—no chasm is left ; and MAN, by a necessary connexion, is placed at the head of this order of things. Had a being been created in his place, with either inferior or superior faculties, he would not have been MAN ; and the link in creation which he now supplies must have been void, and the chain broken, or a being similar to man have been somewhere created. Hence the solution of the abstruse and metaphysical question relative to the origin of evil may, I think with propriety, be referred to the necessary imperfection of man, or the necessity for the creation of a being neither more nor less perfect, or endued with neither greater nor less faculties to complete the grand scale of the universe.

By the term imperfection I would not imply any imperfection in the plan or work of creation, but that which necessarily arises from the nature of subordinate and finite creatures. Had God willed to create, instead of man, a perfect immaterial being, undoubtedly he could have done so ;

but he could not consistently with his divine attributes have placed him in this state of existence. The order of Nature must have been inverted—the present state of things have been differently constituted, or a being superior to man could not, conformably with the wisdom and benevolence of the Deity, have been placed at the head of this world.

The origin of evil, said the Vicar, may, without involving any of the attributes of the Divine Mind, be justly referred to the necessary imperfection of man. It was necessary that in the scale of creation a being should exist with precisely the faculties, powers, and capacities enjoyed by man. Man is the link uniting animal nature to the spiritual, and the first in the chain of intelligent creation.

We have no knowledge of the superior orders of beings, but doubtless they exist in regularly ascending gradations, from man to the highest order of creation, next in rank and glory to the great, the glorious, and incomprehensible Cause of intelligent existence. How vast are the ideas of the Deity which this contemplation excites! and how stupendous the power and majesty of Him who erected the mighty fabric of the universe.

The mind of man is unable properly to contemplate even the attributes of the Deity: in endeavouring to raise itself to the consideration, it sinks into insignificance, and is overwhelmed in the consciousness of its littleness and incapacity to comprehend the cause of itself.

‘The universe,’ said Sir Edward, ‘is a system whose very essence consists in subordination: a scale of beings descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothingness; in which, though we justly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we possibly comprehend it, yet it would be the highest absurdity to hope for in all its parts; because the beauty and happiness of the whole depend altogether on the just inferiority of its parts—that is, on the comparative imperfection of the several beings of which it is composed.’

Had the Almighty, said William, confined himself to the creation of the highest and most perfect order of beings, ‘nothing could have existed but demi-gods or arch-angels, and then all inferior order ~~would have been~~ void and uninhabited; but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be

filled up with beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves and of contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior beings, that is with such as are less perfect; but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the universe, than if none such had been created. It is moreover highly probable that there is such a necessary connexion between all ranks and orders, by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence; and every one in its place, is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabric.'

Utility and uniformity, said Sir Edward, are displayed in every part of nature with which we are acquainted; and doubtless the most beautiful harmony exists throughout superior creation, or amongst the higher orders of intellectual beings.

By surveying, said Sir Edward, the mighty fabric of the universe, and contemplating man as a link in the vast chain of created beings, ascending by regular gradations in progressive steps from inferior to superior orders—from vegetative to animal life—from animals to men—from man

to beings next in the scale of creation, or the chain of the universe—from the link above us to others of a superior degree, and so on progressively to the highest orders of created beings, some of whom probably as much surpass men in their endowments and capacities, as we do the lowest gradation of animated nature; we clearly discern the necessity, that in the chain of existence there should be a being formed like man, invested with no higher capacities and endowments—no greater degree of intellectual prescience, or power to withstand the illicitations of his passions, the allurements of temptation, or the continual incitements to evil with which he is surrounded.

The system of the universe, said George, is without doubt most admirably contrived. ‘God made the whole,’ says Plotinus, ‘most beautiful, entire, complete, and sufficient; all agreeing friendly with itself and its parts; both the nobler and the meaner of ~~them~~ being alike congruous thereunto. Whoever, therefore, from the parts, will blame the whole, is an absurd and unjust censurer; for we ought to consider the parts not alone by themselves, but in reference to the whole, whether they be harmonious or agreeable to the same.’

‘The true origin of evils,’ as Cudworth observes, said Mrs. Osbourne, in his *Intellectual System*, ‘is from the necessity of imperfect beings, and the impossibility of things; but the divine art and skill most of all appeareth in bonifying these evils, and making them, like discords in music, to contribute to the harmony of the whole.’

The origin of evil, said William, has ever been a subject connected with the most abstruse metaphysical investigations, and the most profound researches of the human intellect. The Ancients generally ascribed it to the imperfection of matter, which they considered possessed a power of motion essential to itself. Plato says, ‘that before nature was adorned with its present beautiful forms, it was inclined to confusion and deformity; and that from this habitude arises all the evil which happens in the world.’ ‘God wills,’ says he, ‘as far as possible, every thing good, and nothing evil.’ ‘It cannot be that evil should be destroyed, for there must always be something contrary to good.’ But since the ancient philosophers generally admitted that God was the author of nature, and consequently that matter received its qualities from

him, to avoid imputing to God the defects and imperfections of matter, they had recourse to Fate, and said, that evil was the necessary consequence of that eternal necessity to which the whole, comprehending both God and matter, is subject.' The Epicureans, unable to solve this difficult and intricate question, denied there being 'any author or governor of the world.' The Manichæans, &c. incapable of reconciling the disorders and evils they perceived in the world, to a benevolent cause, imputed them to an evil or malevolent principle, acting in opposition to the good or benevolent one; from whom proceeded 'corruption and death, diseases, griefs, mischiefs, frauds, and villainies.'

Natural evil, said Sir Edward, is obviously necessary to sustain the equilibrium of nature. The storms and tempests of the natural world arise from previous causes or established laws, and are essential to the good of the whole. Moral evil may be no less efficacious in advancing moral agents in virtue, and in promoting the equilibrium of the moral world, although its utility is not so easily discerned; but

The moral world
Which, though to us seems embroil'd, moves on

In higher order, fitted, and impell'd
By Wisdom's finest hand, and issuing all
In general good. THOMSON.

We are not, however, considering the tendency of moral evil to generate virtue in minds capable of deriving improvement from the circumstances in which they are placed, but its cause, as arising from the subordination of finite beings, or the necessary imperfection of man.

‘The imperfection of sensible beings,’ said William, as Lord Kaimes observes, ‘abstractedly considered, impeaches none of the attributes of the Deity, whether power, wisdom, or benevolence; and if so, neither can pain, abstractedly considered, be an impeachment, as far as it is the natural and necessary consequence of imperfection. The government of the world is carried on by general laws, which produce constancy and uniformity in the operations of nature. Our nature is adjusted to these general laws, and must therefore be subjected to all their varieties, whether beneficial or hurtful. We are made sensitive beings, therefore, equally capable of pleasure and pain.’ By infringing the known

laws and moral constitution of his nature, man subjects himself to evil which he might avoid, and to the suffering which necessarily arises from the transgression of the laws of his probationary existence.

Physical evil, except that which results from the nature and constitution of man, frequently arises from moral evil—as intemperance produces diseases and premature corporeal infirmities. The physical evils to which man is subject, as bodily decay and death, are connected with the regular laws of the universe, and are ultimately productive of good, not only to the individual, but to the species at large, being necessary to the support and well-being of the world.

The utility of physical evil, said the Vicar, may furnish us with matter for another evening's conversation; at present we may conclude it was undoubtedly necessary to complete the harmony and system of the universe, that such a being as man should be created. Had he been created without the power to transgress, he would not have been man: he might have remained innocent, but he could not have been virtuous; a state of probation would have been

unnecessary for an infallible but unimproveable creature. From the present constitution of things—the evils with which he is surrounded—the frailties to which the imperfection of his nature renders him subject—the illicitations to the gratification of his passions, and the inferior propensities of his nature, furnish his probationary trials, and are the means of his moral elevation or degradation, according to his strength and advancement in virtue, or mental weakness and debasement of conduct.

Man, said Sir Edward, is a being sensibly impressed by external objects, and subject to innumerable errors and follies; but ‘capable, if he gain the victory over them, of attaining to very high degrees of mental and moral excellence, and eventually of being fitted for a very exalted place in those celestial abodes where dwelleth everlasting righteousness.’

‘Our passions are the rude materials of our virtue, which Heaven has given us to work up, to refine, and polish into an harmonious and divine piece of workmanship. They furnish the calms and storms, the lights and shades of human life: they give virtue both its struggles and its triumphs. To conduct them well in

every state, is merit; to abuse or misapply them, is demerit.

It was necessary, resumed the Vicar, in the plan of the Great Regulator, that a being formed with capacities for attaining infinite accessions of happiness should previously pass through a probationary state, in which the energies of his mind might be developed, and those principles of action acquired which produce virtue, mental elevation, and that moral exaltation of character, without which happiness is unattainable, and cannot under any external circumstances be permanently enjoyed. That firm stability of virtue which towers above the reach of temptation, and looks beyond this

‘ Scene of things,
To brighter worlds on high,’

is generated in this probationary state. The severity of the discipline of moral agents is a means of perfecting them in virtue. Sufferings, trials, and afflictions, are ordinations of the Deity, constituting a part of his divine plan, and are essential to the advancement of intelligent beings towards their ultimate perfection and happiness. Instead of lamenting our condition, murmuring

against the imperfection of our nature, the evils with which we are surrounded, and the trials and afflictions incident to this probationary state, let us cheerfully submit to our situation—patiently endure the sufferings attending it—firmly resist every internal incitement and external illicitation to evil, and by virtuous exertions and conscientious self-government, endeavour to advance towards that perfection which our beneficent Creator has rendered us capable of attaining, if by patient continuance in well-doing we seek for honour, glory, and immortality.

CONVERSATION XII.

On the Utility of Physical Evil.

OUR preceding remarks, said Charles, have demonstrated that the natural imperfection of man is no derogation to any of the attributes of the Deity : neither his power, wisdom, or goodness is implicated by the subordination of any of his works ; since they are all perfect in their kind, or as perfect as their subordinate rank in the scale of creation will admit.

All imperfection, said the Vicar, is comparative, and arises from the diversified operations of nature, and the regular and necessary connexion existing throughout creation. • The wisdom and goodness of the Deity would not have been equally displayed by creating only one order of beings ; as at present, neither could

that one order have subsisted independently of inferior orders, unless the constitution of nature had been totally inverted.

It is no derogation, said William, to the goodness of the Deity, that man is not an angel, any more than that a horse or any inferior animal is not a man. The comparative imperfection of created beings is not a blemish, but a beauty in creation, and is absolutely necessary to the perfection and well-being of the universe.

Man, said the Vicar, in every period of his probationary state, is subject to innumerable diseases, imperfections, and infirmities. Physical evil commences with existence, and pervades his corporeal frame, in a greater or less degree, until its dissolution. Moral evil is connected with mind, and conveys its effect to futurity. Moral evil may be beneficial to the species at large, by generating, strengthening, and calling into action virtues which otherwise might not have existed, but must eventually be productive of pain and misery to the being whom it has reduced to an abject state of moral debasement. Physical evil, although sometimes a source of much

personal suffering, is ultimately highly beneficial to the individual, as it occasions the dissolution of the parts of which his body is composed, emancipates his soul from its probationary bonds, and introduces it to the regions of immortality !

Happy period ! how can the children of ignorance, imperfection, and sorrow, be so blind to their interest, glory, and felicity, as to dread the moment when the blissful dawn of eternity shall open to them scenes of such ineffable delight as at present surpass the powers of human intellect even to conceive !

Amidst the various sufferings of life, the mind which the benevolent principle has approximated towards its divine origin derives unspeakable consolation from the prospect of futurity. The idea of ' that bourne from whence no traveller returns,' imparts no fears to the soul which celestial peace pervades : no gloomy apprehensions cloud their enjoyments, nor fears of the future attend their recollection of the past. The idea of death, instead of being pregnant with horror, is a source of sweet satisfaction. Then the happy child shall again behold its beloved parent ; then the parent shall embrace his long-lost child. How felicitous the contemplation of

such a delightful re-union—of a re-union that can never be embittered by anxiety, suffering, or woe !

Then, said Charles,

The conscious soul shall not
Mistake its partner, but amidst the crowd
Singling its other half, into its arms
Shall rush, with all the impatience of a man
That's new come home. Thrice happy meeting !
Nor time, nor death shall ever part them more.

BLAIR.

The social affections, said Sir Edward, will undoubtedly refine, expand, and enlarge with every other capacity of the mind, and constitute a source of exquisite felicity in the regions of immortality. Every connexion we form should be made if possible with a reference to futurity ; since this life is only the dawn of existence—the commencement of an endless state of being.

Unspeakably happy, said the Vicar, to the children of benevolence, will be the time when

' Heaven opens on their eyes—their ears
With sounds seraphic ring.'

But distressing indeed to the mind which has

been degraded by malevolence must be the hour when Death, with his terrific frown, presents only the gloomy prospect of anguish, misery, and woe.

‘ In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
 Raves round the walls of her clay tenement !
 How wishfully she looks
 On all she's leaving, now no longer her's !
 A little longer, yet a little longer,
 Oh ! might she stay to wash away her crimes,
 And fit her for her passage ! Mournful sight !
 Her very eyes weep blood, and every groan
 She heaves, is big with horror.
 Till forced at last to the tremendous verge,
 At once she sinks !’

The picture is too distressing : humanity recoils at the idea. Let us leave the malevolent to the sufferings which must await them, and consider the folly of embittering life by the fear of that event which will inevitably occur to all men.

‘ Through what vast woes this wild desire of life
 Drives us, afraid—what danger and what toil ;
 Yet Death still hastens ; nor can mortal man,
 With all his efforts, turn the unerring shaft.

If, said Charles, the dissolution of the parts of which our body is composed occasioned the extinction of our being, or deprived us of the con-

sciousness of existence, the fear of death would be still unavailing, as it could not obtain for us a longer residence in this transitory state ; since

‘ Human life
Is but a loan, to be repaid with use.’

But as the corporeal frame of man is subject to the unvarying laws which govern the material world, and that change of being which we denominate Death is the natural consequence of our present existence, the absurdity of fearing an inevitable event is as obvious as the neglect of means for the necessary preparation is criminal and dangerous.

‘ O Mortal ! whence these useless fears,
This weak superfluous sorrow ? why the approach
Dread’st thou of Death ?’

Death, said William, is the separation of the vital principle in man, from the body which it has animated : both parts still exist—but separately, as the body decays and assumes different forms in the material world. No part of nature can be annihilated or destroyed : every particle of matter, however diversified its modification, is incapable of extinction. The leaf that falls to the ground decays, and appears ‘ to be seen no

more;' but it still exists and gives new verdure to the foliage of the succeeding year. Thus

' Life discordant elements arrests,
Rejects the noxious, and the pure digests;
Combines with heat the fluctuating mass,
And gives awhile solidity to gas.'

Matter, said Charles, is incapable of destruction: however diversified the form it assumes, it can neither be annihilated nor diminished. The soul exists amidst every varied change to which the body is subject in this life. 'The particles whereof our bodies consist are continually changing, some going off and others coming in their room; so that in a few years, a human body becomes not indeed different in appearance, but wholly different in substance. But the soul continues always the same; therefore, even in this life the soul survives or may survive several dissolutions of the body. If the union of the soul and body be necessary to the existence of the soul, the dissolution of this union, whether sudden or gradual, whether violent or imperceptible, must destroy the soul. And as the soul survives the gradual dissolution, it is capable of surviving that which is instantaneous.'

If the soul, said William, perish by death, it must be by annihilation; for death destroys nothing, but only separates the parts that had previously been united.

‘ We have no evidence,’ said Sir Edward, ‘ of annihilation taking place in any part of the universe. Our bodies, though resolved into dust, are not annihilated. Not a particle of matter has perished since the creation. The destruction of old and the growth of new bodies imply no creation of new matter, nor annihilation of the old, but only a new arrangement of the elementary parts. What reason then have we to think that our soul, our better part, will be annihilated at death, when even our bodies are not annihilated,’ and no such thing takes place in nature ?*

How pregnant, said Mrs. Wentworth, with unspeakable consolation, is the prospect of the glorious change that will eventually terminate our mortal career! How light and trifling are the most severe sufferings, when compared with the blissful expectation of eternity !

‘For little weighs the passing hour of time,
When with eternity compared—that state
Which, after death, to mortals yet remains.’

Good's *Lucretius*.

How much, said Mrs. Osbourne, are those persons to be pitied, who do not enjoy the consolation derived from the hopes of a happy futurity! and how fallacious the hope, without the conformity of mind, character, and affections, to the standard which reason demonstrates to be essential to happiness in a future state of being.

Before, said the Vicar, the full expectation of future blessedness can be reasonably indulged, the benevolent principle must be permanently operative, the affections spiritualized, and the will rendered conformable to the will of God. Many are the children of error, ignorance, and delusion, who vainly imagine happiness can be attained without the necessary subjugation of the will, the spiritualization of the affections, and the permanent operation of the benevolent principle.

Malevolence must be entirely extirpated from the mind, before it can participate in celestial beatitude, or become fit to ‘be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.’

The prospect of death is not only fraught with consolation, but a source of lively gratitude to the mind that is animated by benevolence and elevated by devotion. The contemplation of that change which will terminate at once our imperfections and our trials, imparts a soothing alleviation to the most acute sufferings. However pregnant our situation with distress and anguish, the blessing of life will ever be to the benevolent, reflecting, and unprejudiced mind, a source of thankfulness; since it is assuredly the dawn of existence, and the first stage towards a state of everlasting happiness and perfection.

How carefully, said Mrs. Osbourne, ought we to guard against embittering the short and precarious term of human life by our thoughtless indifference to the comfort and happiness of our connexions and associates! Those sufferings which are most pregnant with acute anguish, generally result from the wounds of affection and the pangs inflicted by those whose kindness and attention would have increased our enjoyments. The possession of wealth, rank, or talents, cannot impart the heartfelt delight which arises from the affectionate assiduity of tenderness and regard. The approbation of the

world is a fleeting vapour—too light to communicate solid satisfaction ; but the tender affections of friendship can alleviate our cares, soothe our sorrows, augment our pleasures, and constitute the most refined and exquisite enjoyments attending this state of existence. But

‘ This, this is nature, when our friends we lose :
Our altered feelings dictate to our views.
What in their tempers teiz’d us or perplex’d,
Is, with our anger and the deed, at rest ;
And much we grieve no longer trial made,
For that impatience which we then display’d.
Now to their love and worth of every kind,
A soft compunction turns the afflicted mind :
Virtues neglected, then ador’d become,
And Graces slighted blossom on the tomb.’

Defects of temper, said Charles, result from imperfection of mind. When the benevolent principle is permanently operative, it extirpates those blemishes in the disposition which previously prevailed. Elevation of mind is incompatible with faults of temper ; since the temper is the surface of the mind ; and when the mind is properly cultivated, the temper must be calm, mild, and uniform.

The sufferings of life, said Sir Edward, should not be allowed to cloud the temper or destroy

the serenity of a mind that desires to be conformable to the will of God. Whilst we live we must feel. It is not by extirpating feeling that perfection of character is attained, but by regulating and restraining its ebullitions. Placidity of temper in the midst of pleasure and enjoyment naturally arises from the gratification attending external circumstances; but patient and undisturbed tranquillity of mind, in situations pregnant with pain, mortification, and distress, can only be acquired by him whose will is conformable to the will of the Moral Governor of the universe; for

‘ Did not his eye rule all things, and intend
 The least of our concerns, since from the least
 The greatest oft originate, could Chance
 Find place in his dominion, or dispose
 One lawless particle to thwart his plan;
 Then God might be surprised, and unforeseen
 Contingence might alarm him, and disturb
 The smooth and equal course of his affairs.’

The termination of our sufferings and our sorrows, said Mrs. Osbourne, must afford the mind over which death has lost its terrors, subject for the most consolatory and pleasing reflection. Life may possess little to enjoy, and nothing to charm; but whilst life is continued, it

should be considered as a blessing, and a means of acquiring additional improvement : its sufferings should be patiently endured, its comforts and enjoyments cheerfully and gratefully received, and its termination be expected with devout adoration to the Father of Mercies for affording us the consolatory, the delightful prospect of an emancipation from every evil, and for opening to us the glorious dawn of an eternity of happiness, joy, and felicity.

Happy, said the Vicar, is the man whose affections have attained that degree of spirituality which enables him to worship ‘ God, who is a spirit, in spirit and in truth,—whose will is conformable to the will of his Maker—who feels his soul elevated above sublunary things, and who fixes his hopes of happiness in the blessings and enjoyments of immortality ! Let us supplicate the Author of Good, to give us that divine conformity of the will, desires, and affections, which shall render us fit for the beatitude of celestial being, through the merits of our glorious and exalted Saviour ; for

‘ He, our gracious Master, kind as just,
Knowing our frame, remembers man is dust.

His spirit, ever brooding o'er our mind,
Sees the first wish to better hopes inclined,
Marks the young dawn of every virtuous aim,
And fans the smoking flax into a flame.
His ears are open to the softest cry;
His grace descends to meet the lifted eye;
He reads the anguish of a silent tear,
And sighs are incense from a heart sincere.
From each terrestrial bondage set us free!
Still every wish that centres not in thee!
Bid our fond hopes—our vain disquiets cease,
And point our path to everlasting peace.
And when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,
And earth recedes before the swimming eye;
When trembling on the doubtful edge of fate
We stand, and stretch our view on either state,
Teach us to quit this transitory scene
With decent firmness and a look serene.
Let guardian spirits waft our raptur'd soul
To Heaven's blest mansion, its eternal home!

CONVERSATION XIII.

*On the Infelicities of Genius, and on the Moral
Sublime in Character.*

THE distinguishing individual characteristics of the human species, said Charles, arise from the diversity of their natural capacities, their principles, and their acquirements. Principles may be generated and called into action by circumstance and association, but proceed primarily from a higher cause; since circumstances produce different effects in different individuals, according to their susceptibility of external impressions, their capacities, and internal sensations.

The principal difference, said Sir Edward, existing amongst mankind, doubtless arises from diversity of natural ability or different degrees of

intellectual capacity. Peculiar mental susceptibility, lively sensations, strong passions, and ardent feelings, generally accompany the vigour of intellect we denominate Genius, or are amongst its characteristic distinctions.

Genius, said Mrs. Osbourne, in its most extended signification, is an endowment which comparatively few individuals have possessed; and amongst the few who in different ages have been distinguished by the superiority of their intellectual powers, small indeed is the number of those whose happiness has been constituted or even augmented by their intellectual superiority.

The sufferings of genius, said Sophronia, are principally occasioned by the enthusiasm of feelings undirected by principle and unsupported by religion. When principle directs the ardour of genius to its proper channel—when vigour of intellect and comprehension of mind is employed in the search of truth, how delightful must be the pleasure attending the pursuit, and how exquisite and refined the enjoyment resulting from the successful application of superior

mental faculties in this glorious, this animating, this ennobling cause ! Genius is only truly estimable, when its transcendant powers are employed in investigating the works of nature, in displaying the goodness of the Deity, and in developing the designs of ineffable love and unbounded benevolence.

Superiority of intellectual capacity, said Charles, not only subjects man to greater responsibility, but occasions more acute mental anguish than is generally experienced by more humbly invested beings. That vast comprehension of mind which leads to the investigation and developement of causes yet undiscovered in the fields of intellect and science, portrays with clearness and precision the blindness, errors, and follies of mankind ; the tenderness and sensibility which sympathizes in the afflictions of humanity, participates in sufferings it is unable to relieve ; and if unhappily those superior intellectual capacities are clouded by the mists of superstition, the gloom of despondency not only nips the buds of genius, but fills with pain and sorrow the heart that might otherwise have glowed with delight at the prospect of the increasing diffusion of enjoyment and happiness.

The infelicities of genius, said the Vicar, do not arise from superior comprehension of views, or from the natural or acquired enlargement of the intellectual faculties ; but from the restraint or limitation of its powers, and their misapplication or appropriation to subjects incapable of imparting that mental elevation after which it naturally aspires. The frivolities of the world, its vain delights and puerile amusements, afford no pleasure to the mind which is capable of soaring above the trifling pursuits of an unexpanded and unenlightened mind.

The children of genius, said Sophronia, derive no satisfaction from the insignificant trifles that engross and fill little minds. Aspiring intellect and genuine sensibility are frequently alone as it were in the wilderness of the world. Genius seeks within itself, its enjoyments and its consolations. The feast of intellect is denied, or spread with a scanty, an illiberal hand, by Ignorance, Frivolity, and Dissipation.

Genius, said Charles, if properly applied, is capable of yielding to its possessor the most pure, permanent, and refined gratification ; but

this entirely depends upon its direction, and the principles by which it is governed. If selfishness prevail, and genius seek only its own satisfaction and enjoyment, disappointment attends every step, and pain and sorrow await those capacious intellectual powers that excite envy or inspire emulation; but if benevolence pervade the mind and animate its exertions, the possession of genius is a treasure beyond estimation, which enables the individual to attain an exalted rank in the scale of intelligence—diffuses the serene complacency that results from enlarged and ennobling views, elevates the soul to the contemplation of infinite goodness, and enables it to view with the eye of intellectual percipience, the vast designs of unbounded benevolence and ineffable love.

The attainment of intellectual eminence, said Sir Edward, is frequently prevented or retarded by erroneous opinions of the nature of the mental powers: however great the natural capacity may be, cultivation is necessary to the development of the faculties of even the most capacious mind. We are born equally ignorant and uninformed: our knowledge must be acquired, our principles generated, and our affections formed,

according to the established laws and constitution of our nature. Individual ability may be greater, but the means to be pursued for the acquisition of superior intellectual attainments, mental discipline, and moral culture, are invariably the same. Application, perseverance, and steady attention, are the only means by which superiority in any respect can be attained.

My dear children ! said the Vicar, our observations have, I think, clearly demonstrated, that individual virtue proceeds from the prevalence of the benevolent principle of action, and that its permanent operation and extensive diffusion is essential to the advancement of the human species in virtue and happiness ; but our investigation has not yet conducted us to its primeval source. Benevolence unquestionably produces every virtue which elevates and adorns the mind ; but in analyzing human actions, tracing their spring, and developing the motives which occasion them, we have not yet enquired into the cause from whence the principles themselves proceed. Benevolence is generated by circumstance—circumstances arise from the situation in which an individual is placed ; but circumstances do not invariably produce the same effect, or equally

impress different minds : circumstances are the means of generating principles, but not their original source. The benevolent principle is in itself an effect, and not a primary cause ; since it is generated by circumstance, and is neither innate in the human breast nor permanent in its operation, until the mind has acquired that purity, disinterestedness, and spirituality, which elevates it above the predominance of self-interestedness. But before we enquire more particularly into the cause of this principle, let us consider the effects it produces on the character of the individual whose mind it permanently pervades.

The residence of the benevolent principle, said Charles, in its most extended signification, produces effects which elevate and exalt the moral character to the highest degree of human perfection. The enlargement of views and comprehension of mind which proceed from exalted benevolence, impart a dignified superiority to the character which may justly entitle it to the denomination of sublime. Whatever engrosses, fills, enlarges and expands the mind, constitutes a characteristic of the sublime. The moral sublime consequently results from the influence and

operation of the benevolent principle. Were we to examine the effects of this divine, this ennobling principle, we should discern it displaying itself in magnanimity, fortitude, and true greatness. The mind, elevated by its enlarged perceptions, soars above the consideration of its own exclusive gratification and advantage; fixes its hopes of happiness, not in its own peculiar enjoyment, but on its ability to contribute to the happiness and well-being of others. This ennobling motive gives dignity to the most insignificant actions, raises the soul nearer to celestial beatitude, exalts our nature, and will finally constitute our perfection and felicity.

The actions which proceed from this sublime principle, said the Vicar, can only be truly ennobling to man or pleasing to God; since they alone proceed from a proper motive—a motive whose purity is known to the Creator, and whose active effects not only produce individual happiness but promote general utility. This principle is generated in the present state of existence, but will refine, enlarge, and expand throughout every period of eternal being; and when the immortal mind has existed through ages of progressive and transcendent felicity, even then

shall the soul, filled with grateful adoration and unspeakable love, retrace with delight the happy period when this principle was generated—perhaps amidst circumstances pregnant with the most excruciating anguish—raised it above the selfish considerations of his animal nature, and when the joys of eternity dawned with ineffable refulgence on his enlightened imagination.

How great and inconceivably happy, said William, must be that glorious Being whose benevolence pervades creation, shines in the regions of unbounded space, and delights in the extension of existence and the diffusion of happiness. Benevolence is the essence, the primary attribute of the divine mind, and its contemplation is the most glorious consideration that can fill the soul.

The conviction of the unbounded beneficence of the Deity, said Mrs. Wentworth, imparts divine consolation to the mind that is blessed with just and exalted perceptions of the Author of Nature; it consoles us in affliction, distress, and suffering, and supports us in the hour of our mortal dissolution.

The goodness of the Deity, said Sophronia, is

so eminently displayed in every part of material and animated nature, and his wisdom and power exerted with such benignity and skill, that to doubt his benevolence in its most extended signification, is a derogation to intellect and an insult to the Creator.

Goodness, said Charles, is doubtless equally displayed in etherial as in material nature. Ineffable benignity glows in the regions of incomprehensible space, every where dispenses existence, and will eventually diffuse throughout every part of sensible and intelligent creation universal perfection, felicity, and blessedness.

The man, said Sir Edward, whose mind is elevated by such just and glorious perceptions of the Author of Existence, ' may see much error which he may lament, and much misconduct which he may pity ; but a generous affection towards the whole human race will dilate his heart. To the utmost of his ability he will enlighten the ignorant, correct the erring, sustain the weak, bear with the prejudiced, and reclaim the vicious. Firm to his own principles, he will not trench on the liberty of others. He will not harshly censure, nor suspect an evil

motive, where integrity and conscience obviously direct the conduct. Mildness will be on his lips; forbearance will mark his actions; and universal charity will connect him with the wise and good of all climes, and of all religions.'

The man, said the Vicar, 'who believes that a being of almighty power, unerring wisdom, and unbounded love, is seated at the helm of affairs, and is making every event promote in its appointed measure, the highest happiness of all intelligent creatures, must possess perpetual serenity and peace. The storm of adversity may gather above him, and burst upon his head, but he is prepared against it, and it cannot dismay him. He knows that the evils which encompass him are only blessings in disguise. The fair face of nature smiles upon him with a brighter radiance. The boundless expanse of Heaven above him—the painted plain beneath him—the glorious Sun, that diffuses light and life over the ample and beautiful creation, are magnificent gifts of his Father, on which his enlightened eye can behold engraven the promise of his higher destiny. The narrow precincts of the tomb can neither bound nor obstruct his enlarged view: it extends beyond the circle of earth, and reaches

to that celestial world, where progression in excellence is infinite, and happiness is unchanging and immortal. Nothing can disturb his steady confidence. In the most awful moment of his being, his feeling is sublime, as his destiny is glorious: even while he is partially subdued by Death, and dragged to the confines of the tomb—while he is sinking into it, and it closes over him, he can exclaim in triumph, O Death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.*

* Smith, on the Divine Government.

CONVERSATION XIV.

On Good.

THE acquisition of good, said the Vicar, is in a greater or less degree the desire of every human being: it is this which stimulates our exertions, excites our industry, and animates us in the pursuit of every gratification, possession, or qualification, which merits the name, or which we conceive to be essential to our happiness or well-being. To ascertain precisely the nature of that good which is most deserving the pursuit of an intelligent creature, is an enquiry becoming an intelligent mind, and to which I should be happy at present to direct your attention.

The different ideas entertained of good, said William, abstractedly considered, depend so

greatly on situation, association, the connexions and dependencies of life, that to conceive an external good universally applicable to every human being, is perhaps impossible; since Providence has so wisely distributed the lot of man, that in the diversified situations in which he is placed, what to one individual or at one period might be considered a good, at another period would assume the appearance of evil. The Indian, whose chief delight is in the pleasures of the chase and in the simple enjoyments which his humble condition affords, would experience little gratification in being admitted into the most elegant and refined society. The ardent youth would find little to please in the calm repose which is so much valued in age; nor the matron return with pleasure to the amusements of infancy. Every state and situation has its peculiar external good, which imparts satisfaction during the appropriate period, but afterwards probably occasions ennui or inspires disgust.

The bliss we covet seems, at distant view,
 'To all superior; but when once possess,
 It cloy, we spurn it, and another call.'

Good and evil, said Sir Edward, as qualities of

mind implying enjoyment or suffering, are exclusively referable to sentient and intelligent beings. 'Pleasure is unquestionably natural good, and pain natural evil.' But before we proceed to enquire more particularly into the nature of good, let us consider the opinions the Ancients generally entertained on this subject.

'The Peripatetics,' said George, 'classed every thing that was by its nature or use desirable, under the general predicament of good; and every thing by its nature or abuse to be shunned, under the opposite predicament of evil.'

'The Stoics maintained, that nothing was to be classed under the predicament of good, but what was at all times invariably to be chosen; and that nothing was to be classed under the predicament of evil, but what was at all times invariably to be shunned or rejected.'

'The Epicureans substituted the term pleasure for good, intimating that whatever was pleasant was therefore good.' They were divided in their opinion; some considering the chief good to result from intellectual pursuits, others from personal gratifications.

Plato, said Sophronia, taught, 'that virtue is

to be pursued for its own sake; and that all those things which are called good by men, are in reality such only as far as they are derived from the first or highest good, which is mind, or God. The only power in human nature which can acquire a semblance to the Supreme Good, is reason; and this semblance consists in prudence, justice, sanctity, and temperance.'

Virtue, said Henry, according to Aristotle, is either theoretical or practical. 'Theoretical virtue consists in the ~~due~~ exercise of the understanding: practical virtue is acquired by habit and exercise.'

Good, said Charles, may be considered relatively, comparatively, and positively. Relative good arises from its connexion with its antecedent cause, and may be derived from a variety of external circumstances. Comparative good is evident by comparison; and positive good is a certain unalienable good, permanent in its operation, and invariably pleasurable in its effects. External evil may produce relative good, and indeed is the cause from which it generally proceeds. Comparative good can only be ascertained from its intermixture with some degree of evil. The

utility of evil, and its capability of producing good, may be discerned in its consequences ; as it is frequently beneficial in correcting individual defects, and in eradicating improper propensities.

A good, said the Vicar, to be positive, must be permanent, capable of communication and of increase, and can only with propriety be referred to mind ; since mind alone possesses the qualities that admit the duration and increase of good.

Diversified opinions of good, said Sir Edward, produce the diversity observable in the pursuits, characters, and attainments of men.

The man who considers riches as his chief good, is ardent in their pursuit, and fixes his hopes of happiness on their acquisition ; but this enviable possession, when attained, is found to be incapable of imparting the happiness so ardently sought and so anxiously desired. This remark may also be applicable to rank and acquirements. The most exalted situation or the greatest attainments, cannot diffuse that serene peace and ineffable tranquillity which is essential to the permanent enjoyment of positive good.

· Look round the habitable world, how few
 Know their own good, or knowing it, pursue !
 How void of reason are our hopes and fears !
 What in the conduct of our life appears
 So well designed, so luckily begun,
 But when we have no wish, we wish undone !

JUVENAL.

It is evidently deducible, said Charles, from the nature and constitution of man, that the human mind was formed for the attainment of an infinite accession of perfection and happiness. The chief good of man must arise from the proper exertion, application, and developement of his mental capacities, and their appropriation to the attainment of those principles of action that will eventually produce his perfection and felicity. The benevolent principle must therefore be a positive good ; since it eradicates vice, constitutes virtue, elevates and expands the mind, and raises it to the contemplation of Divine Beneficence.

The benevolence of the Deity, said Mrs. Wentworth, is exemplified in every operation of creative wisdom. A very superficial acquaintance with the works of nature will afford convincing proofs of the ineffable benignity of its divine origin.

‘What a scene of enjoyment does the tribe of insects, fishes, of all the inferior animals, exhibit, from the beginning to the end of life! Those whose conformation fits them for motion, how delighted are they to run, to fly, to leap, to swim! how incessantly are they gliding from place to place, without any apparent object, deriving gratification from the very exercise of their limbs! Those which delight in rest, how happy are they in the loneliness of the shade, in basking in the sun, or grazing in the field! In a summer-evening, how exhilarating is it to the spirits, to leave for a while the busy hum of men, and wander beneath the clear blue sky, and amidst Nature’s own works! What millions of happy creatures every where surround us! above us, around us, beneath us, every thing is in motion, every thing is happy. The air, the earth, the water, every tree, and every shrub, and every little blade of grass, teems with delighted existence. Scarcely can we fix our eyes upon a single spot in which there is not life and happiness! Which of the millions of creatures that press upon our sight does not by every movement declare, that to the full measure of its capacity, it is happy?’ Let us, my dear children!

endeavour to enlarge our conceptions of the Deity, by attentively observing his goodness as displayed in his works.

‘ Read Nature !—Nature is a friend to TRUTH.’

‘ Whom Nature's works can charm, with God himself
Hold converse, grow familiar day by day ;
With his conceptions, act upon his plan,
And form to his the relish of their soul.’

If the benevolence of the Author of Nature, said Charles, be deducible from the conformation of inferior creatures, the study of man must still more enlarge our conceptions of the vast designs of the glorious Cause of intelligent existence; for ‘ if we examine the higher faculties with which man is endowed, and judge of the purpose for which they are imparted, by that to which they are adapted, we cannot mistake the ends they are designed to answer. He can observe the beauty and order of the world in which he is placed ; he can investigate the causes of its phenomena ; he can ascertain the laws by which it is governed ; he can penetrate into the secret recesses of nature, and contemplate the processes by which many of the wonders that surround him are formed. He can extend his view beyond

the boundaries of his own world, calculate the distances of the worlds above him, ascertain their magnitude and trace their movements. He can perform a still more difficult task : he can retire into himself, investigate the principles and propensities of his own nature, and reason respecting the very faculties by which he conducts the astonishing process of thought. Endowed with affections which lead him out of himself and attach him to his fellow-beings, he can rejoice at their joy, and weep for their woe : he feels himself bound to them by the most tender and endearing ties, so that without society he is gloomy and sad ; while so long as he cherishes the generous affections in his intercourse with men, cheerfulness smiles upon his features, and happiness dilates his heart. He can sit in judgment on the nature of his own conduct ; distinguish between good and evil ; and while he glows with admiration at the contemplation of what is benevolent, generous and sublime, he feels indignation and disgust at the selfishness that considers only its own good, and the vice that pursues it at the expense of the general happiness. He can even hold intercourse with the Great Being who gave him existence, and who crowns him with good ; and though a

mystery, which at present he cannot pierce, shrouds the Sovereign Spirit from his mortal vision, yet he can feel a solemn and endearing consciousness that he is continually present with him; that he is above him, and beneath him, and around him; that he can go no where where he is not, and do nothing which he does not see: he can hear his voice instructing him in his duty, and perceive his hand directing him in his course, and rejoice in his promise, assuring him that he shall re-awake from the sleep of death, burst the fetters of the tomb, enjoy immortal youth, and pursue with unwearied step, through the countless ages of eternity, attainments which rise higher and higher in infinite progression, and which perpetually fill and enlarge his capacity.*

How exhilarating and delightful, said Sir Edward, is this rational view of the faculties and destination of man! The process of improvement has already commenced—to acquire perfection and happiness. The faculties of man ‘do not require to be changed in nature, but only increased in degree:’ his affections must become perfectly disinterested, his desires spiri-

tualized, and his will rendered permanently conformable to the will of HIM

‘ Whose name we read emblazon’d high
With golden letters on the illumin’d sky ;
Nor less the mystic characters we see,
Wrought in each flower, inscribed on every tree.’

Happy, said the Vicar, is the man who, alike free from the illusions of enthusiasm and the shackles of prejudice and superstition, raises his mind to the devout contemplation of the glorious Cause of universal existence, and whose enlarged and unclouded views allow him to perceive that the Author of Nature,

Beholding in the sacred light
Of his essential reason all the shapes
Of swift contingency, all successive ties
Of action propagated through the sum
Of possible existence, he at once,
Down the long series of eventful time,
So fix’d the dates of being, so dispos’d
To every living soul of every kind,
The field of motion and the hour of rest,
That all conspir’d to his supreme design,
To UNIVERSAL GOOD.

ALLEN. DE.

CONVERSATION XV.

*On the Means of attaining Good.*

AS the enjoyment of good, said the Vicar, is the natural desire of every human being, a knowledge of the means that lead to its permanent acquisition is of the first importance to a rational and intelligent agent; since without attention to the necessary means, no end can be obtained.

Health, said William, is unquestionably a good desirable to all, and a blessing that cannot be too highly appreciated. The mind is incapable of developing its energies or of fully exerting its powers, when the body is oppressed by infirmity or weakened by disease.

The personal virtues, said Sir Edward, are essential to the enjoyment of health ; because intemperance, dissipation, vice, and folly, produce premature bodily infirmity and decay. Even too assiduous application to the cultivation of intellect is injurious to the constitution, as it produces weakness, languor, and mental debility. Moderation in every respect is essential to the continuance of enjoyment ;, by exceeding its bounds, evil is produced, and suffering naturally occasioned.

Contentment, said Mrs. Wentworth, is as necessary to peace of mind, as temperance is to health of body. Habits of both should be carefully cultivated, by all who are desirous of permanently enjoying good.

External good, said Charles, as social, relative, and domestic pleasures, the possession of an ' elegant sufficiency ;' physical good, as health and strength of body, are in some respects partial distributions of the gifts of Providence, as they are not equally enjoyed by every individual ; but in the diversity of external good bestowed in a greater or less degree on every human being, we may be convinced that ' He who is too wise

to err, and too good to be unkind,' gives to every individual that portion of external good which is calculated, in the design of ineffable Benevolence, to promote his final and permanent well-being, and the general extension and diffusion of good.

The cultivation of intellect, said William, is essential to happiness, to virtue, and to piety. A knowledge of right must be acquired previously to the practice of rectitude. Propriety of conduct, patience, fortitude, and all other modifications of virtue, evidently result from the perceptions of the understanding. The culture of the understanding must therefore be essential to the permanent attainment and general diffusion of good.

Scientific knowledge, said Charles, by enlightening and expanding the mind, is an obvious means of attaining those enlarged perceptions that lead to the developement and expansion of the powers of intellect. The mind stored with internal resources, is happy in retiring within itself, and derives unspeakable gratification in those moments of solitude and seclusion which are so carefully avoided by the ignorant, the thoughtless, and the vicious.

Scientific pursuits, said the Vicar, are only to be deprecated when they are considered as an end on which the mind ultimately rests, instead of a means leading to the attainment of the highest good. The acquisitions of science enlarge the mental powers, by conducting the mind to the investigation of primeval causes; but when the attainments of science are considered as the principal object on which the mind is to concentrate its powers, science is misapplied, and becomes injurious by confining the views of the individual to the means, instead of raising the soul to the contemplation of the important end, or to the glorious first cause of intellect and science.

Science, said Sir Edward, as a means leading to the acquisition of good, cannot be too highly appreciated. Scientific pursuits speedily and securely conduct to the path of truth, elevate the mind to the contemplation of the first Great Cause of order, harmony, and perfection; enlarge the mental faculties by concentrating the powers of intellect upon objects capable of effecting their expansion, and turning the mind inwardly upon itself, give ac-

accuracy to its perceptions and precision to its ideas.

Happy the man the causes who discerns
Of things created.

VIRGIL.

Scientific knowledge, said Charles, by enlightening, elevating, and expanding the mind, affords just views of the designs of Creative Wisdom. The attainments of science, by enlarging the powers of intellect, expel pride, arrogance, conceit, and pedantry; and naturally produce genuine and profound humility.

‘ True wisdom still by modest doubt is shewn,
And ne’er decides what never can be known;
While hardy ignorance and foolish pride
Nothing perceive, but every thing decide.’

Scientific pursuits, said Sophronia, raise the mind above the consideration of those insignificant trifles that engross and fill little minds. The soul, elevated by the sublimity of its perceptions, grasps into a focus the harmony of the universe, and contemplates the attributes of the Deity in the perfection of his works. The eye of science beholds in every part of creation, existing proofs of wisdom, power, and benevolence.

Each plant, each blade of grass, affords indubitable evidence of the incomprehensible goodness, transcendent greatness, and refulgent wisdom of the Author of Nature. The scientific mind

‘ Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.’

The mind, said Charles, that glows with the consciousness of the existence of wisdom, power, and goodness, too vast for reason to comprehend, sinks into humble reverence and profound adoration, worships that power whose benevolence he every where perceives, and adores the goodness that thrills his breast with sensations too exquisite for lasting enjoyment, in a state where external objects continually press on his notice, attract his attention, and draw his soul from the sublime contemplation, the transcendent perfections the Deity affords. The soul filled with unspeakable gratitude and profound adoration, worship that Being who animates his frame with life, fills his heart with love and his soul with devotion. The sublimity of such sensations produce

‘ The grand in conduct, and the pure in thought,’

elevate the mind, spiritualize the affections, and approximate the soul towards the beatitude of celestial being. Divine Source of Good ! may we thus feel thee in our hearts, perceive thee in thy works, and humbly adore thy incomprehensible benignity and ineffable love.

How sublime, said Mrs. Osbourne, are the consolations and how exquisite the enjoyments of religion ! It is this ineffable refulgence that irradiates our benighted minds, enlarges our perceptions, animates our souls with the extatic hope of a glorious futurity, imparts peace, consolation, and blessedness in this life, and the delightful prospect of increasing happiness, perfection, and felicity in that state of being towards which we are continually advancing.

‘ When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
 When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue,
 ’Tis this that wards the blow or stills the smart,
 Disarms affliction, or repels its dart;
 Within the breast bids purest rapture rise,
 Bids smiling Conscience spread her cloudless skies;
 And when Disease obstructs the lab’ring breath,
 When the heart sickens, and each pulse is death,
 Then then Religion shall sustain the just,
 Grace their last moments, nor desert their dust.’

‘ Religion,’ said Sir Edward, ‘ is the true

philosophy of Celestial Wisdom : it is the instructor, the guide, and the friend of man, in all his relations and in all the circumstances of enjoyment or suffering in which he can be placed. To the individual, it is a source of consolation and an anchor of hope amidst all the transient tumults and disorders of the world ; and as it strengthens all the bonds of social order and moral virtue, it dignifies, strengthens, and exalts a nation. It addresses its divine language equally to the highest and lowest in human society, because their essential interests, both in time and eternity, are equally concerned in the instructions it administers.'

Religion, said Charles, is unquestionably the chief good of man : it is this divine principle, this guide to celestial glory, that alone can constitute his perfection and happiness, elevate his mind to the proper contemplation of his Creator, advance him in the scale of being, animate his exertions for the good of his fellow-creatures, purify his desires, and raise his affections above the sublunary enjoyments of transitory and delusive world.

' The Almighty Mind,
Who breath'd on man a portion of his fire,

Bade his free soul, by earth nor time confined,
 To Heaven—to immortality aspire.
 Nor shall the pile of hope his mercy rear'd
 By vain philosophy be e'er destroyed;
 Eternity! by ALL or wish'd or fear'd,
 Shall be by ALL or suffer'd or enjoy'd.'

That philosophy, said the Vicar, which is not strictly united with religion and founded on revelation, does not merit the appellation, as it is vain, futile, and unsubstantial, and must progressively vanish before the diffusive and increasingly irradiating beams of Divine Truth,

'And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
 Leave not a wreck behind.'

While the mind, said Sophronia, is shackled in its researches, and fearful of exerting its powers, truth is but dimly seen: her radiant and glorious lustre, veiled by prejudice and obscured by superstition, cannot diffuse its celestial beams to irradiate, cheer, and invigorate the soul. Error, delusion, and folly, dread investigation, and fear to encounter minute inspection; but Truth invites enquiry: the more she is examined, the higher is her radiance, the more diffusive her influence, and the more inspiring her divine and glorious light.

‘ Inquiry, said the Vicar, is to truth what friction is to the diamond : it proves its hardness, adds to its lustre, and excites new admiration.’

‘ Reason is the eye of the soul,’ the glory and distinction of man, and can never be more properly employed than in investigating the works of Nature, and in displaying the ineffable refulgence of Divine Truth.

CONVERSATION XVI.

On the Union of Religion and Philosophy.

FROM contemplating, said Charles, the nature and constitution of man, the power and operation of motives influencing his mind, and the principles of action directing his conduct, we are naturally led to enquire more particularly into the cause from whence the principles themselves proceed. Our observations have, I think, been calculated to prove that every action arises from diversified modifications of the benevolent, selfish, or malevolent principles. The selfish principle is undoubtedly the most natural to man, malevolence proceeds from its abuse, and benevolence from its subjugation, or at least from such a degree of elevation of mind and disinterestedness of the affections, as diminishes the

estimation and consideration of self, and excites the ardent desire of promoting the interest, happiness, and well-being of others.

The study of human nature, said the Vicar, enables us properly to appreciate the importance of revelation, to perceive the sublimity of Christianity, the value of its divine precepts, and their exact conformity with the nature, constitution, and final destination of man.

Revelation, said Sir Edward, instead of being incompatible with the perceptions of enlightened reason, is perfectly in unison with philosophy, or rather is its perfection or zenith. The operations of Nature, in the grand work of creation, are in some degree even perceptible to the enlarged views of the scientific and philosophic mind. 'When the command of the supreme Eternal Being had put in motion the vast chaos of unformed matter floating in the immensity of space, those luminous and volatile parts of matter which constitute light were separated from those which were more heavy and opaque, after which, the waters being separated from the earth, the firmament was formed, probably arising from the terrene particles sinking into solid globes

and the aqueous particles, being lighter, floating on the top and covering the whole surface of the earth and other opaque bodies. The waters thus overflowing, the planets were separated by the intervening expanse of air called the firmament, after which the waters descended into the vallies or the lowest parts of the Earth and other planets, and the land being left dry, acquired its vegetative power. The volatile particles of light were subsequently formed into compact bodies, constituting the Sun and fixed stars, which are different suns enlightening different systems; after which, the creation of animal life took place, and last of all, of man." Thus is the scriptural account of Creation strictly philosophical, and the absurd cosmogonies of unassisted reason clearly discoverable, to the mind that is enlightened by science and irradiated by the sacred beams of Divine Truth. .

" — Let there be Light ! proclaim'd the Almighty Lord;
 Astonish'd Chaos heard the potent word ;—
 Through all his realms the kindling Ether runs,
 And the mass starts into a million suns ;
 Earths round each sun with quick explosions burst,
 And second planets issue from the first ;
 Head, as they journey with projectile force,
 In bright ellipses their reluctant course ;
 Orbs wheel in orbs, round centres centres roll,
 And form, self-balanced, one revolving Whole.
 — Onward they move amid their bright abode,
 Space without bound, *the bosom of their God.*"

Nature and reason, said Charles, evidently demonstrate the existence of a First Cause, the primeval source of all things, who governs by his pervading energy the operations of nature, sustains the innumerable worlds that revolve with undeviating regularity in the immensity of space, diffuses to myriads of diversified orders of beings life, enjoyment and happiness, and regulates the Universe by unvarying laws, to which the whole of Creation is subservient.

Every effect of creative power, said the Vicar, demonstrates the existence of a primeval cause; and that cause, however incomprehensible to our limited capacities and finite views, is GOD. The nature of that being whose transcendent perfections surpass the comprehension of the most enlightened of his creatures, can only be known by the active operations of his Divine energy; and these proclaim, that the source of existence, the origin of all things, is GOOD. It is GOODNESS lights the sparkling gems that gild the firmament, fills the etherial expanse with countless worlds, and undoubtedly with innumerable orders of sentient creatures, all deriving enjoyment and existence from the Fountain of Good.

What, said Sir Edward, but Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, could have arranged matter with such inconceivable harmony and perfection as is discernible throughout Creation, animated so many of its minutest particles with life, and pervaded boundless nature with an immensity of existence and an infinite diversity of being?—

‘ In thousand species of the insect kind,
 Lost to the naked eye, so wond’rous small
 Were millions join’d, one grain of sand would
 cover all.
 Yet each, within its little bulk, contains
 A heart which drives the torrent thro’ its veins;
 Muscles to move its limbs aright; a brain
 And nerves disposed for pleasure and for pain;
 Eyes to distinguish, sense whereby to know
 What’s good or bad, is or is not its foe.’

The gloomy perceptions of an uncultivated and unexpanded mind cannot obscure the existing effects of Divine goodness, nor restrain its active operations, but must diminish the most exquisite sources of felicitous contemplation that can be enjoyed by an intelligent, a rational, an immortal mind.

Error, said Charles, proceeds from contracted views and wrong conceptions. The nature of

things is not altered by the ideas we imbibe or the sentiments we entertain; but our happiness may be diminished and our intellectual progress retarded by erroneous opinions. It is of importance to our highest interest and essential to our privileges as rational beings, that we endeavour to entertain just views, and that our general perceptions should be in conformity to truth or in unison with the whole tenor of Divine Revelation, the prerogatives of intelligent agents and the good of mankind.

Prejudice, said Sophronia, has ever been inimical to the extensive diffusion of truth. Before prejudice can be effectively subjugated, ignorance must be diminished, its slavish fetters broken, and the mind emancipated from the dominion of pride, superstition, bigotry and error.

Revelation, said the Vicar, is the source from whence truth derives its lustre. Without Revelation, Truth could never have emerged from the gloomy mists with which Ignorance overshadowed her, or stood unveiled to our view in her present radiant and invigorating splendour. It is remarkable that in the infancy of the world, the religion established by Divine command,

was precisely in unison with the nature of the human mind, in its infantine or uncultivated state. Children and uncivilized nations are always most sensibly impressed by strong figures and striking images; refinement and civilization are essential to that superior degree of mental expansion which enables man to derive from himself those internal resources which result from the proper cultivation of the intellect. In the fulness of time, it is said, our blessed Redeemer brought life and immortality to light. It was necessary that mankind should be in some degree civilized, before the sacred beams of Divine Truth could be manifested by the sublimity of a Religion pure, unsophisticated, energetic, and glorious as that of Christianity. The abuses that have in every age in some respects obscured the splendour of its rays and sullied the purity of its doctrines, have not diminished its intrinsic value, sovereign power, or sacred influence; they are veils that necessarily arise from the weakness of the human intellect, the ignorance and prejudice of the uncultivated mind, and the pride, presumption, and imperfection of man. The time is progressively advancing when the knowledge of Him, whom to know is life eternal, will extensively prevail. The pride of reason, the

assumptions of intellect, the gloom of superstition, the delusions of enthusiasm, the bigotry of prejudice, the narrow views of ignorance, and every other cloud that tarnishes the lustre and obscures the operations of Divine Grace, and prevents the enlarged perceptions of enlightened reason from unfolding themselves, or truth from manifesting its sacred lustre, will eventually vanish, and unsullied truth stand unveiled in splendour too radiant for the contracted views of an uncultivated and unexpanded mind. To advance this glorious, this happy time, should be the ardent desire and constant endeavour of every one who assumes the title of Christian.

Christianity, said Mrs. Wentworth, in its vital power and genuine purity, cannot exist independently of the operation of the benevolent principle of action, since it is this which constitutes its primeval essence, its dignity, simplicity, pervading energy, and Divine influence.

In contemplating, said Charles, the union between Religion and Philosophy, we may remark, that what the investigator of the principles of human nature would denominate the active operation of the benevolent principle, the

Christian who imbibes his opinions and derives his sentiments from the Scriptures, designates charity. The effects of both are precisely the same. “Charity,” said the Apostle, “suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth. And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three, but the greatest of these is Charity.”

For constant *Faith*, and holy *Hope* shall die,
 One lost in certainty, and one in joy:
 Whilst thou, more happy pow'r, fair CHARITY,
 Triumphant sister, greatest of the three,
 Thy office and thy nature still the same,
 Lasting thy lamp, and unconsumed thy flame,
 Shalt still survive——
 Shalt stand before the Host of Heaven confest,
 FOR EVER BLESSING, AND FOR EVER BLEST!

PRIOR.

Charity and benevolence, said the Vicar, produce precisely the same effects, and if properly investigated, would be found to be the same

principle and derived from the same origin. But Philosophy is incapable of tracing this Divine principle to its primeval cause: its researches would only perplex and bewilder us; we must, therefore, have recourse to a higher source, and consider what the *Scriptures* teach us respecting the cause of every virtuous desire, and the origin of every virtuous action. But before we commence this important and highly interesting subject, allow me to remark that our preceding observations have been founded on an investigation of human nature. Reason has assisted us in our enquiry; we have by its light alone endeavoured to develope the principles from whence actions proceed, or by which human conduct is regulated and governed: we have in no instance designedly discarded its sacred light, but considered "that reason is the monitor placed by Almighty God in the breast of every individual, to preserve his intelligent and accountable creatures from the commission of evil." For

'Tis Reason our Great Master holds so dear,
'Tis Reason's injured rights his wrath presents;
'Tis Reason's voice obey'd his glories crown'd.

YOUNG.

Therefore in our succeeding remarks, we should not discard it as useless, but have recourse to a more infallible guide; because it is not of itself sufficient to lead us to the sacred fount of SOVEREIGN GOOD.

CONVERSATION XVII.

*On the Sovereign Good, or the best Interest
of Men.*

MY dear children, said the Vicar, we are now come to the most solemn, the most interesting and important part of our subject. As a father who is tenderly anxious for the good of his children, and as a pastor whose bosom glows with ardent desire to promote the best interest of his flock, I cannot but feel deeply impressed with the importance of a subject so intimately connected with your future happiness, final well-being, and immortal interest.

The best interest of man, said Charles, must always be most effectively promoted by acting in conformity to the laws established for the govern-

ment of the conduct of intelligent agents. We have clearly ascertained that the first law of our nature is to seek happiness and to avoid misery: happiness is derived from the practice of virtue, misery results from the commission of vice; the nature of virtue and vice has already engaged our attention. Virtue proceeds from the operation of the benevolent principle, vice from the prevalence of gross self-interest and the influence of the malevolent propensities; these are points which a minute investigation of the principles of human actions would prove to be incontestible. We are now, therefore, to enquire into the cause from whence that principle proceeds, whose influence and operation constitutes the essential difference existing amongst men.

In considering this important subject, said the Vicar, it is necessary to have recourse to a higher and more infallible guide than human reason: the Scriptures alone can aid our enquiries and direct us to its proper source; and these declare, that Grace, Divine Grace, is its operating cause. My dear children, let us not impartially attend to the dictates of reason, and reject a light before which reason appears as a glimmering

taper. "Marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again;" marvel not that I most seriously affirm that the soul must be renewed by Divine Grace; the benevolent principle must be generated before virtue can permanently reside in the breast, be active in its operation and durable in its effects, or before the soul can be prepared for that state of blessedness which awaits the spirits of the just made perfect.

My dear children, this is no superstition, fanaticism, or enthusiasm, but truth, sacred, revealed divine truth; it is not by rejecting revelation, or opposing its doctrines, that man displays the vigour of his intellect or the acuteness of his reason: on the contrary, like a vapour which vanishes before the resplendent rays of the meridian Sun, so does every obstacle which is placed in opposition to Divine Truth, or which would impede the splendour of its invigorating beams, vanish before its refulgent and glorious light. Revelation will for ever remain a subject on which the most capacious powers of intellect must dwell with delight, and contemplate with sacred and increasing pleasure.

As Revelation, said Sir Edward, was written by men and for the use and instruction of men,

it was necessary that its language should be in conformity to their general comprehension and ideas, and therefore in many instances obviously suited to the capacities, circumstances and knowledge of the persons to whom it was addressed. Its whole tenour is evidently designed to promote the practice of virtue, from principles which elevate, refine and expand the mind, and which only constitute the real dignity and permanent interest of man.

The superior excellency of the Christian dispensation as a system of morals, said Sir Edward, is obvious from a very superficial investigation of its nature and tendency. Even Lord Bolingbroke remarks, that “no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind,” and that “no system can be more simple and plain than that of a religion as it stands in the Gospel.” “The system of religion which Christ published and his Evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of religion, natural and revealed: it contains all the duties of the former; it enforces the whole law of Faith, by promising rewards and threatening punishment. The gospel is in

all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity. Its simplicity and plainness shewed that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and also manifested the divinity of its origin."

The mental purity and elevation, said Mrs. Wentworth, which the Gospel requires, is in the highest degree calculated to promote the happiness of man, by raising the mind above those sublunary objects which limit and confine its powers, and which are incapable of producing permanent enjoyment. "Chose admirable," says Montssquieu, "la religion Chrétienne qui ne semble avoir d' objet que la felicité de l'autre vie, fait encore notre dans celle-ci."

The man, said Mrs. ~~Grove~~ ^{Grove} Bourne, who fixes his hopes of happiness on any enjoyment this world can afford, leans upon a reed, which pierces the hand or bends beneath its pressure. Happiness is sought in vain in sublunary objects. Nothing but God can satisfy the desires of an immortal mind.

The best interest of man, said Charles, must

be most effectively promoted by the attainment of that principle which approximates the soul to its Divine Origin. The spirit of benevolence may be truly stiled the Spirit of God:—it is an emanation of the Deity, an impartation of his divine nature—of his primeval essence. Let no one presume to say he is born of the Spirit, or has been regenerated by the power of Divine Grace, who does not evidence by the active operation of this divine principle, his union to the First Great Source of virtue and happiness, to the fountain of all good, excellence and perfection.

The sovereign good of man, said the Vicar, undoubtedly consists in the attainment of that principle of action which progressively advances the soul towards its perfection and felicity, which produces a life of ~~usefulness~~ usefulness and happiness, and the delightful prospect of an eternity of inconceivable ~~blessedness~~ blessedness and increasing felicity. Our observations on the nature of man have demonstrated, that the highest degree of merit attainable in this probationary state is only comparative; that our best actions cannot of themselves entitle us to any recompence, (although from the moral constitution of our nature they contain the seeds of happiness,) since it is

self-interest, and to subjugate malevolence. Let us, my dear children, supplicate the Author of good, to give us that divine spirit which emanates from, and leads to HIM. Let not the frequent assumption of this sacred principle, unevidenced by its genuine effects, lessen our desire to attain the most pure, perfect, and disinterested benevolence. Let us seek to enjoy not only the consolations but the pleasures of religion. Let devotion warm our hearts, benevolence permanently pervade our minds and influence our conduct, that we may exemplify the power and loveliness of genuine Christianity here, and contemplate with ineffable delight the happy moment when the perfections of the Deity shall be unveiled to our view, and his benevolence be evidenced in the increasing perfection and happiness of his intelligent creatures, throughout an eternity of progressive improvement and perpetual felicity.

FINIS.

